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NOTES

This enlarged **PR** will be the last issue this year. Librarians please note this completes Volume XL.

HAROLD ROSENBERG's new book, **Discovering the Present,** pieces on art, culture, and politics, will be out in November from The University of Chicago Press. He selected the illustrations for "Thugs Adrift." . . . A collection of **JOYCE CAROL OATES's** "comedies" will appear next year as **The Hungry Ghosts,** published by Black Sparrow Press. . . . **DAVID ZANE MAIROWITZ** is a New Yorker living in London. He will publish an impressionistic history of the American left, **The Radical Soap Opera,** in 1974. . . . **PHILIP ROTH** has just finished a new novel entitled **My Life As A Man,** to be published in 1974. . . . **ROBERT MEZEY** is teaching in the University of Utah writing program. . . . **ALBERTO GIRRI** is an Argentinian poet. . . . **PHILIP SCHULTZ** is teaching in and around Boston and finishing a novel, **Plenty.** . . . **ROCHELLE OWENS's Karl Marx Play** is touring Europe, including Paris and Berlin. . . . **JEROME ROTHENBERG** has been living on the Allegany Seneca Reservation in Western New York State. New Directions will publish **Poland/1931,** his fourteenth book of poems. . . . **RAYMOND FEDERMAN's** latest novel—in French—**Amer Eldorado,** will be published early in 1974 by Editions Stock, Paris. Versions of both "Surfiction" and "Literary Disruptions" will appear in his collection **Surfiction: Fiction Now . . . and Tomorrow,** due from Swallow late this year. . . . **JEROME KLINKOWITZ** describes himself as "a Midwestern solipsist whose essays roll out of the Midwest like new Fords." He teaches at the University of Northern Iowa. . . . **JONATHAN BAUMBACH** spent the summer in London covering the film scene. He teaches at Brooklyn College, writes fiction, and makes home narrative movies. . . . **PAUL DELANY** teaches at Simon Fraser University and is at work on a study of D. H. Lawrence. . . . **PETER GAY,** Durfee Professor of History at Yale, is preparing a series of lectures for Cooper Union which will attempt to marry the history of art and the art of history. In the spring he will publish **Style in History.** . . . **VINCENT CRAPANZANO** is the author of **The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry** just published by the University of California Press. He teaches courses at Princeton bridging anthropology and literature. . . . **NEIL SCHMITZ** is at SUNY/Buffalo and is currently working on a study of **Leaves of Grass.** . . . **COLIN FALCK,** an English poet and critic, coedits **The Review. Backwards Into the Smoke,** a collection of his poems, is from Carcanet Press. . . . Head of Columbia College English Department, **GEORGE**

(*Continued on p. 550*)

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POINTS AFTER

COVER STORY

We had sworn not to write anything about Watergate, since it was hard to imagine how anything new could be added — particularly after the incisive piece by Harold Rosenberg in this issue. But we do feel compelled to make some general observations about the implications of this Grade B political scenario.

• The White House was able to invoke the idea of national security because there is no clear and accepted idea of national security. The members of the Senate Select Committee never fundamentally challenged the notion that any belch on the left, especially on the lunatic fringe of the left, shook the foundations of the country, because they had been brought up on the idea that all radical activities, not only crazy and sectarian ones, were alien to what is assumed to be the American Way. Hence a handful of "infantile" left-wingers could be used to justify the furtive maneuvers of the White House staff to extend its powers.

• Similarly, the Senators and the lawyers of the Watergate committee rarely pushed the "witnesses" very far. One kept wondering why double-talkers like Haldeman and Ehrlichman, who were vague when they should have been specific, and specific when nothing was at stake, were repeatedly permitted to get off the hook. The only explanation we can think of — other than incompetence — is that the Committee simply did not want to press the case very far, because all of them — not only the loyal Republicans — were part of the system of assumptions and conclusions represented by the administration. They must have felt, perhaps not so consciously, that to press the case very far would put them outside the premises of the entire system of politics in this country.

• The critical question of who was responsible for the various Watergate plots was rarely touched on, and then very lightly. Obviously, those who were caught were not acting on their own. Some of the more important witnesses talked as though participatory democracy prevailed at the White House, with everyone simply doing his thing, without orders from above and very little communication with fellow-conspirators.

• In this respect, it must be said that the brazen performances of some of the actors, like Haldeman and Ehrlichman, suggest that they could count on the support — and ignorance — of a large section of the

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American people. In a sense, they were right, insofar as many Americans automatically respond to certain accepted notions of patriotism, national security, and American politics. It has been argued, with some persuasion, that the blurring of party lines and of political issues generally has served to contain political extremes and to keep the country in a state of democratic chaos that passes for stability. But in certain situations, as in the post-Watergate crisis, the blurring of political distinctions has muddled the national consciousness. It is particularly striking that up to now (at the time of writing) not a single leader of the Democratic Party has made any public statement about the full meaning of Watergate; nor is there any radical grouping or leadership that has produced more than dissenting noises. Except for a few outstanding journalists, like Reston and Wicker, the whole intellectual community appears to be in a state of shock, or stupor. One wonders how long a democratic society can be maintained while so large a part of the population remains politically illiterate and gullible.

• Watergate has made it even clearer than before that the sectarianism and the craziness of left groupings in this country have served to justify the secret power moves of the White House conspirators. If any further proof of this lesson is needed, it is evident once again that stupidity always plays into the hands of one's opponents. Clearly, Nixon won so handily because the country thought that a vote for McGovern was a vote for anarchy, for crime, for student revolt, for hippies. And whatever support Nixon still has comes largely from the belief, which the Democrats have allowed to persist, that the alternative to Nixon would be worse than Watergate. How else explain that a majority of the people think Nixon is implicated in Watergate, but only a minority want him ousted.

• Watergate has altered one's sense of the possible. If politics, as Bismarck said, is the art of the possible, then Watergate must be seen as an effort to extend the limits by underground methods.

In the past we had assumed that large conspiratorial acts and frame-ups by agencies of the government, with the connivance of the FBI, were impossible in this country. For one thing, it seemed that too many people would have to be involved in the plot, and with newspapermen and liberal crusaders on the prowl for a scandal — or just a story — secrets of this kind couldn't be kept very long. We had assumed that only the paranoia of the dispossessed assigned unlimited power to the government. And the alarmist idea that fascism — or some more conventional plot to seize power — was always just around the corner was what one came to expect from a sectarian and doctrinaire left.

But after hearing the conspiratorial stories coming out of the White House, fantasy moved closer to reality. Politics in this country is so fluid and formless that one still can't say what might have happened if the break-in at Watergate had not been bungled — perhaps nothing but a few political adventurers playing with power. But the whole thing is scary, not only because it leads one to wonder what is possible but because it also makes one question one's sense of the country. There have

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been many conspiracies and conspiracy theories, but so far as we know this is the first time in this country that the government itself was the conspirator, ostensibly to protect itself from conspiracies on the left — something usually associated with the military in backward countries and the far right in advanced ones.

• Naturally most conservatives support Nixon. Still we were surprised to find Irving Kristol, who we think would still like to be known as a liberal, and Sidney Hook, who speaks of himself as a socialist, coming out for the Republicans in the last election. The justification, we assume, was to save America from the young and middle-aged kids on the left. We were also surprised to see many of the contributors to a symposium in *Commentary* as late as last spring quite sympathetic to the aims of the government that gave us Watergate. But even on the other side of the fence, it was distressing to see left liberals stand political reality on its head by also supporting Nixon against McGovern — on the ground (for which there was not a bit of evidence) that he was more likely to pull out of Vietnam.

• *The New York Times* recently asked the signers of an ad for Nixon in 1972 whether they still felt the same way about him. Some of the replies were evasive, to say the least, and after all the revelations of Watergate quite shocking. Sidney Hook, for example, in effect stuck to his earlier stand by saying he would have voted for the Socialist Labor Party had he known it would be a Nixon landslide. Edward Shils gave the forthright reply that he had specified there be no university affiliation after his name, as though that were the issue. Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb also met the question head on by declining to comment. If there was ever any doubt about it, it is reassuring to know that no group or movement has a monopoly of political foolishness or equivocation; and obviously conservatives have just as much right to be victims of their own ideology as radicals. But it is disturbing to see intellectual conservatism serving as a shield for moral obtuseness and political insensitivity to the implications of Watergate.

• One notable part of the Watergate spectacle has to do with the gyrations and contortions that the "cover-up" required. This side of things is beginning to find peculiar counterparts in the intellectual world — a kind of "play-it-down" among the articulate and uneasy. An example of this tendency is to be found in an article on Watergate by Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Rabb in the September issue of *Commentary*. Intending ostensibly to locate Watergate within its proper historical context, they end up by more or less denying both history and the scandalous character of the incident itself. They do this by instituting a comparison between Watergate and the raids after World War I, led by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, against domestic radicals. Their conclusion is that in contrast to this earlier episode, Watergate was a covert operation, whose most elaborate part was the "cover-up, which is itself a measure of the restraining power of the cosmopolitan climate not only within the administration but in the nation at large — in, that is, the growing cosmopolitanization of the American people." In other

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words Watergate — particularly because of its covertness — is a demonstration of progress. It is a sign of how our native provinciality has been overcome, in both government and American society. What it means according to Lipset and Rabb is that "more and more Americans have learned to lace their biases with democratic restraint." This utterance deserves to be recorded as Lipset's and Rabb's corollary to Pyrrhus's definition: one more such demonstration of domestic restraint and we are lost.

The tendentiousness of this argument is equalled only by the abuse it does to history — the tendentiousness is in fact a part of the abuse. Not only is the analogy weak and lame in all the ordinary senses; but to invoke it with such emphasis is to assimilate the present to the past in such a way as to dissolve the meaning of Watergate. Moreover, such analogizing suffers from the special heavy-handedness, tone-deafness, and myopia that commonly afflict certain kinds of sociologists when they deal with questions that require historical sense and discrimination. For what it leaves out is much of what came between the 20s and the present — the world-historical experience of the 30s, 40s, and 50s of authoritarian and totalitarian bureaucracy, and their accompanying technologies. The whiff given off by Watergate, the scent that has sent shivers down some American spines, does not come from burning crosses. John Ehrlichman is no Grand Kleagle without hood and bedsheet. The real hallucination was that one kept expecting him momentarily to materialize in a smart black uniform and jack boots — and that one couldn't believe what one was seeing and hearing.

All analogies are imperfect, and their value lies in their suggestiveness. But try to imagine what it would have been like in 1906 to read an article which argued as follows: "The Dreyfus case is at last over; the court-martial verdict has been quashed, Dreyfus has been readmitted to the Army, has been promoted and given the Legion of Honor. Justice has been done, and the strength, resiliency, and fundamental soundness of the Third Republic has been demonstrated again." We would probably be justified in suspecting the disinterestedness of the writer of such a piece. We might even suspect that this argument has certain political ends in view. Later on a phrase was found for such performances — *La Trahison des Clercs*. Or we can reduce the charge and find Lipset and Rabb guilty of ideology — an intellectual misdemeanor committed by intellectuals who claim not to believe in ideology. But this is bound to happen when one tries to explain away something that needs to be explained.

W. P., S. M.

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Harold Rosenberg

THUGS ADRIFT

> The hijackers radioed to officials in the Dubai control tower that they were "awaiting instructions," but they did not say from whom or where. — Report in *Newsday,* August 1973

Like the story of the hung-up hijackers, that of Watergate is a mystery dealing with sources of instruction. In whose mind did the idea of the break-in originate? Who authorized it? And who passed it on as an order to those who executed it? Witnesses testified at the Senate hearings that they were simply "carrying out an assignment" which in their view seemed, at least at the time, within the normal range of their duties. John Mitchell, Herbert Kalmbach, Anthony Ulasewicz, and other White House–connected persons refused to admit that they had done anything wrong, though considering the events in retrospect some now believed they ought perhaps to have behaved differently. Ulasewicz, the ex–New York cop who initiated complicated methods for having paper bags full of one-hundred-dollar bills fall into the hands of Watergate defendants, saw himself as strictly a "tool." But Kalmbach, Nixon's lawyer, from whom Ulasewicz received his assignment, said he was also acting on instructions and also saw himself as a tool. The tool and the tool of the tool each agreed separately that he had been "used," which is what tools are for. But neither Ulasewicz or Kalmbach could say by whom they were used. The Watergaters acted within what they kept calling, with evident pleasure at playing soldier, a "chain of command." In the sum of the hearing's testimony, however, the chain led nowhere. At most it consisted of two or three links — e.g., Dean, Kalmbach, Ulasewicz — reaching down from the empty air. Erlichman even denied that he had advised Kalmbach as a friend that it was "proper" to raise money to help the defendents, though Nixon said later in his press conference that people were always raising money for defendants. Mitchell denied that he had listened to Liddy. With Erlichman and

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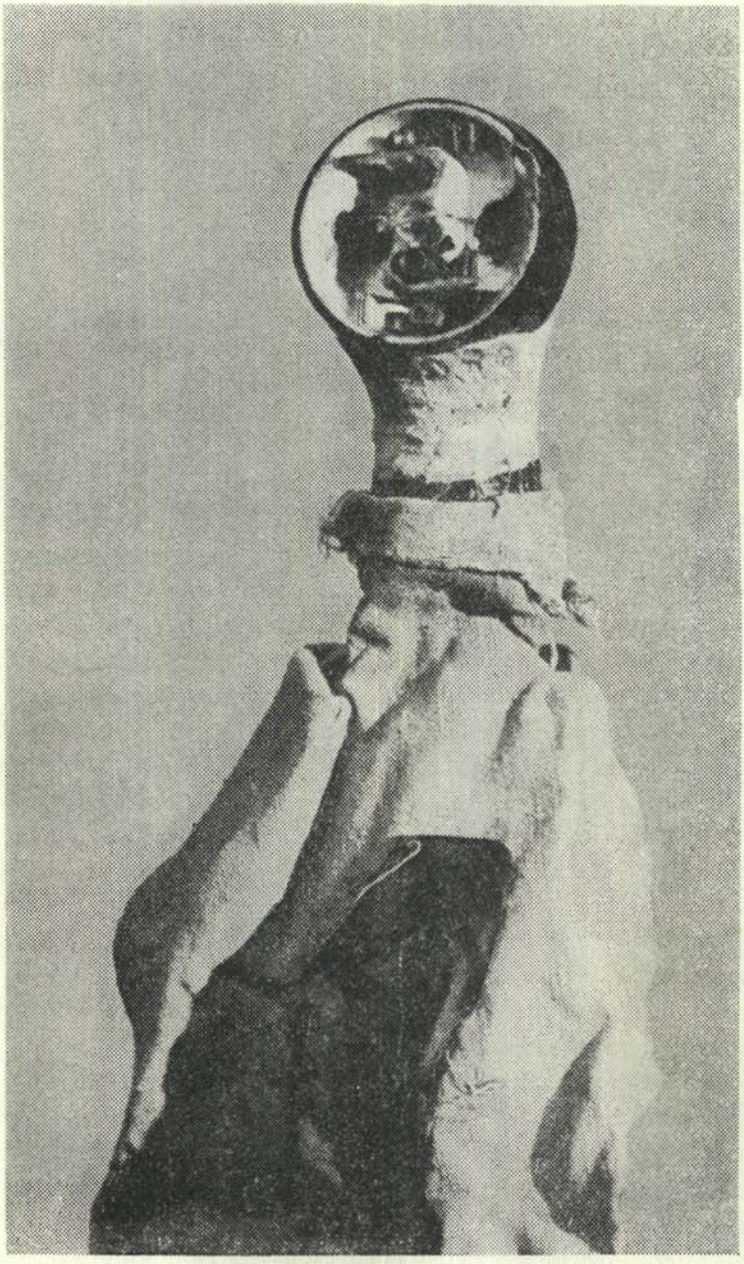

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Haldeman every fact that connected one action with another was smashed against a stone wall of denial or forgetfulness. These men empowered to say the last word had authorized nothing, given no instructions.

Nixon himself advanced the theory that no human instructions were necessary. Hunt, McCord, the Cubans had acted in response to the voice of history. They had absorbed the vibrations of lawlessness generated in the 1960s by antiwar demonstrators, hippies, and civil rights activists. Reacting against these outrages, they had become lawless themselves — a case, to follow Nietszche, of gazing too long into the abyss, so that the abyss gazed back into them. Thus corrupted by the enemy, they became "overzealous" in behalf of their cause: the reelection of Richard Nixon. History pointed them in the right direction but failed to instruct them as to just how far to go. Having overshot their mark, they found themselves surrounded by policemen in the Watergate offices and from then on history had nothing more to say to them.

In his scheme, Nixon made clear, "overzealousness," even in behalf of the most worthy of aims, is conducive to crime, and he condemned illegality on the part of "either side." He did not go as far as FDR did when he told John L. Lewis "a plague on both your houses." Nixon in his statement was not being irritably evenhanded; he was only supporting the evenhandedness of the law. His burglars had fallen in a righteous cause, as had those finest of public servants Haldeman and Erlichman, and the demonstrators certainly lacked the justification of these high-minded patriots. Still, "overzealousness" had produced crime, the crime of getting caught — and the penalty was forfeiture by the criminals of their connection with their ideal, the President. In becoming the means by which plots against the enemy were dragged out into the open, they had themselves given aid and comfort to that enemy. They had forced Nixon's hand, since to approve their behavior he would have had to affirm that a central principle of his policy was that the Democratic Party ought to be destroyed.

Could Nixon have any other view? Since the thirties, the American right has been dreaming of a revolution that would end the system out of which came the "twenty years of treason" represented by the New Deal. Nixon arose out of this dream. Evidence was

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adduced at the Senate hearings that Haldeman had prepared to revive the myth that demonstrations in behalf of the Democrats were financed by Moscow gold. Someone on the right — was it Goldwater? — had declared that too much zeal (extremism) in the defense of freedom is not a vice, a statement that constitutes a revolutionary manifesto in which law is put in second place behind ideological enthusiasm. But when the program of the radical right was forthrightly presented by Goldwater in 1964, it was overwhelmingly defeated. Nixon supported Goldwater, but to him Goldwaterism is another form of overzealousness, in that it invites being caught by the voters. He believes in the right-wing revolution, but he believes in revolution by stealth. His is a *politics of cover-up*. Watergate is the quintessence of his quarter of a century in public life. He has come close to leading the radical right to triumph through presenting its program in the nonradical terminology of Middle American aspirations: support of the Constitution, individual freedom, reduced bureaucracy, grass roots control, prosperity without inflation, world peace, and so on, a list of objectives irrelevant to his real aim — that of consolidating a centralized power — and which his years in office have consistently violated. It is said that Mitchell, Haldeman, and other Nixon intimates hate the term "cover-up." With good reason: it sums up the entire Nixon philosophy of masquerade and concealment as the means of ruling a free country.

In exposing White House inroads into the American system, Watergate has forced Nixon to assert the *right* to cover up. His swollen conception of Executive Privilege is nothing else than a demand to be allowed to run the government in secret: to bomb in secret, to make trade deals in secret, to pressure corporations for campaign contributions in secret, to take steps against a secret list of enemies, to commit secret crimes for the sake of what he chooses to define as "national security." Nixon says that his predecessors also ordered break-ins and wiretaps. Be that as it may, Nixon is the first President of the United States for whom the right to hide his actions is the essence of his office. Everyone else, from the Secretary of State and Congressional leaders down, is spied upon and bugged — the President alone is the invisible seeing eye. Nixon requires Executive Privilege not, as he says, in order to protect confidentiality but to hide the systematic pattern of his moves to concentrate power in his own

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hands. Executive Privilege puts him in a position to blur parts of the design and thus to make the whole illegible. Nixon demands Constitutional authority to conspire to vitiate the Constitution.

Though he lacks the revolutionary mettle to defend illegality in principle, Nixon declares that he accepts "full personal responsibility" for Watergate. What does this mean? If taken seriously, it is an expression of solidarity with the burglars and an adoption of the break-in as Nixon's own action. He is the instigator, if not by direct instruction then by general encouragement, of acts in this category. Nixon's responsibility is consistent with his idea that the criminals only erred in being overzealous. If Nixon is responsible, history is not responsible; antiwar demonstrators are not responsible; Liddy, Hunt, McCord, and the Cubans are responsible only as Nixon accessories. If Nixon is responsible he belongs in jail with the others. Accepting full responsibility is the stance of the revolutionary leader who asserts his identity with his adherents to the extent of sharing their fate. "I am responsible" means, if you lock them up you must lock me up too. In 1917 the Bolshevik leadership assumed responsibility for the July uprising which they had tried to prevent, in order to shield the revolutionary masses from governmental reprisals, and Trotsky and other Bolsheviks went to prison. Acts of violence perpetrated by Nazis in the days of Weimar were claimed by Hitler as acts of his own. Nixon accepts responsibility for the Watergate crime against the Democrats in order to hold his leadership among activists of the right. But while his vanguard sits in prison, he sanctimoniously assures the public that they deserve to be punished. He takes responsibility, they take the punishment. No wonder it is reported that the Cubans are mystified and enraged. They thought they were acting under the direction of a leader who dared to take his reelection into his own hands. Instead they find themselves abandoned by the master of cover-up.

Nazi thugs knew that their chain of command reached directly to the Fuehrer. By the time leading Nazis were tried at Nuremburg, Hitler was dead. This left a vacuum at the top, comparable to Nixon's ignorance but opposite in its effect on those below. In Jerusalem, Eichmann invoked the missing leader, as had Nazis of all ranks, to argue that he was only a "little man," a "cog in the wheel." All the Nazis were "innocent" because their guilt ascended to Hitler. In the Watergate affair the guilt was not allowed to rise but was shoved

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down as far from the White House as possible. As the main line of defense, Haldeman and Erlichman were charged with preventing the chain of command from passing through them into the Oval Room. But since no one above them would assume responsibility, they could not claim to be "cogs." The guilt would fall on them. If they were to avoid it, the Watergate "wheel," and other dirty tricks, had to be self-starting.

The techniques for projecting crimes back upon those physically captured while committing them deserve careful scrutiny. The key, as revealed in the fencing of Haldeman and Erlichman with the Senate Committee, is to avoid giving an order, or to give it in a form that allows more than one reading of it (as in Erlichman's memo on the raid of the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist). By this device Erlichman and Haldeman could create accomplices while staying out of the action. L. Patrick Gray was given to understand that the Hunt files were to be destroyed but no one ever told him to destroy them. To be head of an agency in the Nixon Administration, one had to be able to take a hint, then act on one's own. That the White House desired the action made it "proper" and provided moral absolution. To lack susceptibility to hints, or faith in the cleansing power of the White House, was to be disqualified. Pat Gray was qualified enough to accept the Hunt file and eventually to burn it — and he was rewarded by receiving the nomination to direct the FBI. But poor Gray's faith in the power of the White House to grant remission of sin was faulty — he trusted the President but wondered about his lieutenants. Like other Americans he failed to grasp that everything done by the White House represented a single will. As early as July 1972, Gray warned Nixon against his chief aides, and this led in time to his being left to "dangle in the wind." A common myth of authoritarian regimes is that the Czar, the Pope, or the Leader is a prisoner of his subordinates (see Gide's *The Vatican Swindle*), and that if he only knew the facts things would be entirely different. Nixon's "ignorance" of Watergate is a version of this game; John Mitchell presented himself as the Grand Vizier who locked out the President from knowledge that might have damaged him.

White House bosses Haldeman and Erlichman conducted themselves as if they expected all along that some day they would have to

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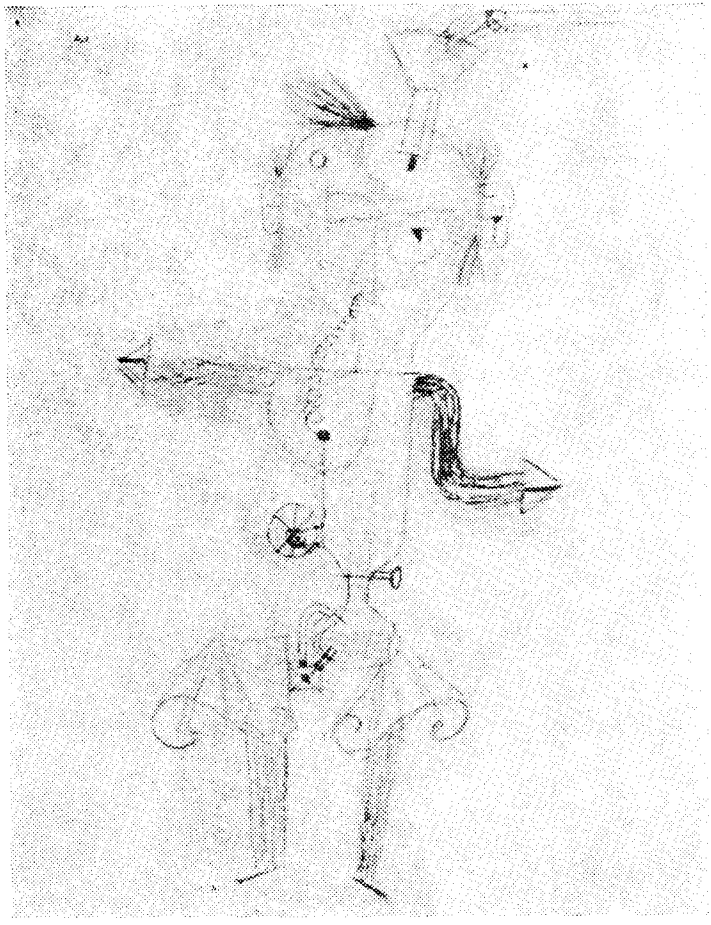
account for their actions in a courtroom. Executive Privilege might save them from trial, but if it failed they had to be prepared to save themselves. Thus they functioned, so to speak, as predefendants, ready to meet any accusation regardless of what it might turn out to be. As it happened the crime was Watergate — no doubt, it could have been one of a dozen or even hundreds of others. There are entire fields of this Administration's performance — e.g., Nixon's appointments to regulatory agencies — in which potential scandals are con-



Automaton, *from* Paul Klee and the Bauhaus,
courtesy of the New York Graphic Society.
(Paul Klee Foundation, Berne Museum of Fine Arts)

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stantly bubbling. Not the least of the contributions of the Senate hearings is their exposure of the system of rules by which Nixon and his associates have been able to evade or blunt charges of incrimination. Understanding the White House processes of maintaining innocence is at least as important as convicting the perpetrators of the break-in and cover-up. Hence, to end the hearings has become Nixon's primary goal in regard to Watergate.

To organize crimes through hints rather than through direct instruction requires that the instigator and his tool shall share a common vision. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Smerdyakov reads the desire for the murder of the father in the mind of Ivan and appoints himself as agent to carry it out. The Nixon collaborators were similarly moved by an essence beyond speech. In regard to Watergate, the planners, the burglars, and the operators of the cover-up lived in the aura of The Presidency — that transcendental entity that in the Nixon Administration had come to reign over the White House. Nixon himself professes to worship this abstraction, which Americans and the whole world are being urged to revere. He withholds the tapes, says the President, not to protect Richard Nixon but to preserve the future integrity of The Presidency. The Chief of State, his staff, the armed forces, the Federal agencies, Billy Graham, Liddy, Hunt, the four Cubans, the American people take on a tribal unity as they kneel before this golden calf. Nixon buys real estate in Key Biscayne and San Clemente: The Presidency transforms it into temple precincts, and public monies are poured into aggrandizing and making "secure" these sacred groves. I know of nothing more offensive to the sensibility of a free individual than the Hollywood-style metaphysics by which Nixon has glamorized his corrupt invention of a Presidency that exists independently of the President. Meditating alone on the beaches of the Pacific or the Caribbean, Nixon seeks inspiration from the Muse of The Presidency, later to return to himself in the company of Abplanalp or Rebozo. The principle of separation of church and state ought to be enforced in Nixon's White Houses. If he wishes to remain as Chief Executive he should be obliged to abjure publicly the superstar Other to which he has been striving to convert Americans. In the United States there is room at the top, according to the Constitution, only for a mortal being — not for a noumenon with measureless powers and endless immunities.

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Stephen Spender

AMERICA AND ENGLAND

Just as Americans measured their civilization against the European, so today the English measure theirs against the American achievement.

England does not have the advantage which the Americans once had of an immense future. Nor does it have very much even of its past. With the distancing in time from its historic heritage, with the destruction of its landscape, and with its towns becoming changed into drab examples of international vertical-box architecture, the past is a shrinking asset.

Some English literature since 1945 has become provincial — not just in relation to America but in relation also to the English past, perhaps even in relation to Europe. The provincialism is not that of Hawthorne's New England, to which so little that was complex and aesthetically civilizing had happened, but of an old England tapering down to the diminished scale of postwar urban planning, Red Brick Universities, the Welfare State. This new provincialism provided the subject matter of the early fiction of Kingsley Amis, John Braine, David Storey, John Wain, and other post-war novelists. Angus Wilson drew pictures of a society of idealistic, serious-minded planners (by some irony of history outdated at the very moment at which they had the opportunity to put into practice their planned society) contrasted with the far from socially responsive, cynical, mini–pleasure–bent younger generation, sons of Belial of the New Planned City.

In their novels and criticism, some of these writers turned admiringly toward the gritty realism of Arnold Bennett's tales of the Five Towns, and disliked the fictionized poetic sensibility of Lawrence,

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Forster, and Woolf. But Bennett was describing a self-confident, expanding, ebullient society, not the England that was contracting. His England of bumptious wealth and humiliated poverty, the lives of "cards" and millionaires, spinsters and shopwalkers, was as remote from the England of the 1950s and '60s as that of Forster's Wiltshire Downs. The postwar England, described by Angus Wilson and David Storey, was that of hole-in-the-corner planned towns where just beyond the Public Library or Civic Center or arty café, hideouts could be found for unhygienic, unplanned delights and squalor.

The postwar novelists and playwrights depicted a new and cynical England of the young, emerging from the smooth, clean planned society. This was much closer to the world of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* than to the honest brick-and-muck Midlands of Arnold Bennett.

Richard Hoggart made the point, in his *The Uses of Literacy,* that much of the folklore and handicrafts of the rural England, which had been driven into the dark barracks of the slums, had persisted throughout the industrial revolution. His book gives a picture of myths and games and weaving — codes of the organic community transmitted through the genes of slum-dwellers — which is moving, yet it scarcely accounts for the Teddy Boys, the Beatles, the Hell's Angels, the Skin-heads — the country of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange.*

If there was an England of vivid life before the industrial revolution which had passed through the tunnel of the nineteenth-century factories, mines, and slums and emerged into the suburban sunlight of the Welfare State, this was not a sociologist's dream of the resurrected English village. It was a London and Liverpool of youths who looked like survivors from village greens in Good King Charles's Golden Days. They were in fancy dress and with hair, long and luxuriant and rolled in locks like those adored by Milton, cascading over their shoulders. Among them were marvelous mimics and actors who seemed like inspired impertinent children from the novels of Dickens, and artists with a taste for the local and irreverent. There were also some excellent playwrights. The best and most characteristic thing that came out of this postwar England was the *performance*: as though the life which had been suppressed by Puritanism, industry, and respectability, was that of comedians, the Shakespearean clowns, the proletariat of the funnies and of Pop art.

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Together with the impertinence there was also a sense of evil, of the provincial kind described in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and his wonderful short story "Young Goodman Brown." All evil might, I suppose, be described as eccentric, in that it is a refusal to fit behavior into the center of the general interest. But there is evil which is the behavior of those who do not even have knowledge of that center and who move into little corners of their own obscenities, exploiting their surroundings for opportunities of such corners offered. This is the essentially *provinicial* — Hawthornish — evil described by David Storey in his novel *Radclyffe,* and actually practiced in the famous case of the Moors' murders. It is perhaps also related to the evil described by Iris Murdoch in her novels, though Miss Murdoch places it within the weaving pattern of social rituals, like movements in a dance.

* * *

To English writers, the great attraction of America is its being the center of energies which are entirely contemporary. These show themselves in the arts — painting, fiction, and poetry — when these express an American total sum of present-day consciousness not of a civilization confined to one class or to an élite. The American writer seems open to everything that happens in his country. His attitude is summed up in the idea of "projectiveness." He is open to the whole surrounding experience which pours through his senses and realizes itself, almost spontaneously, and in a form mostly free, in his work. He regards literature as the means through which, almost mediumistically, he realizes this material.

I know that there are many exceptions to all this, but I am concerned here with what attracts the English writer — particularly the young writer — to the United States. He goes there for the "turned on," the energetic, the "confessional" — not for the technical perfection of a Richard Wilbur or a James Merrill. Both material and treatment are extremely varied. The novelist often deals with the sheer quantity of surrounding life. To take some obvious examples, there is Saul Bellow's Chicago; the pressure of the highly individualistic ebullient rebellious members of the Jewish family in the work of Philip Roth; the permutations of sexual pairs and groups in John Updike's Westchester County; the realization of human relations through a symbolic language of objects bought in chain stores or at "organic" food shops, in the urban America of Mary McCarthy.

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There is that deluge of spermatozoa, condoms, obscenity, and hilariousness which wells up from the *Ursprungen* of Henry Miller but branches later into Norman Mailer's New York orgasmic journalism, the obsessive homosexual manhunts of John Rechy's fictional reportage, and the crammed, stuffed, claustrophobic sadism of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*.

It might be objected that a great deal of poetry is just the opposite of this, being subjective and private. It is true that certain American poets, for example W. S. Merwin and James Merrill, preserve a quite aristocratic distinction and sense of privacy in their work, in which they also show strong European influences. But the nation, with all its junk and automobiles, pours through the most characteristic American verse. I take down a volume from my shelves and read this by Philip Levine — material of a kind which flows through the work in poetry magazines. It is dated *Detroit, 1968*:

> A winter Tuesday, the city pouring fire,
> Ford Rouge sulfurs the sun, Cadillac, Lincoln,
> Chevy gray. The fat stacks
> of breweries hold their tongues. Rags,
> papers, hands, the stems of birches
> dirtied with words.

But surely the so-called confessional poetry of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, and others is private? Not really. In the first place the material of these confessions is often of a clinical, psychiatric, or divorce case and therefore essentially public kind. Secondly, one theme running through the confessions of these poets is: "Look, this is what America's done to me. Driven me round the bend. Driven me to suicide." Confessional poetry represents the democratization of the personal and private, and often the psychotic, inner life. In this it is not religious, nor subjective, but case book material.

* * *

Henry James wrote that the Americans were the most self–conscious people in the world. A hundred years ago this meant consciousness not only of being American, but of not being European. It was in the 1920s that the writers of the "lost generation" experienced the inescapability of the fate of being American. The nation was the Eumenides to which they were the pursued Orestes unable ever to

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escape. There were no hideouts abroad and at home, no holding back the overflowing of individual consciousness by the inflooding day-to-day forever shifting public "state of the nation." The individual might well feel that in order to resist this tide he had to make prodigious efforts.

Americans are conscious of the morale of their country in a way that Europeans only are in times of extreme crisis, such as its occupation by a foreign power. Living in the United States one often has the impression of being crushed between the pages of a story which is being written and whose latest installment is a summation of the whole American past within the present moment. One hopes nervously that among all the scandals, national and local, in the news, one won't get snitched between the teeth of the typography. When I asked a friend of mine who was leaving the United States after having worked there for several years, what he would miss most about his life there, he replied: "The sense of living in the middle of a crime story."

In the minds of many Americans the concept of America is a situation which changes from day to day, over which they often grieve, and sometimes rejoice, but which — although they know it will change again tomorrow — always has a certain up-to-date finality about it. One does indeed, even as a foreigner, get caught up in this: as though one's mind were a television screen upon which the country was perpetually on trial and whose moral condition profoundly affects one's own.

In the spring of 1973 (at the time of the opening up of the Watergate scandal) I read in the newspaper of a woman tourist visiting Washington to see the cherry blossom, who suddenly, in the presence of the newspaper's correspondent, burst into tears at the thought (which she wailed into a microphone) of the contrast between the beauty of the marble-columned capital and the ugliness of the scandals swarming from the White House (President Nixon's personal Pandora's Box). The newspapers reported the lady's reaction as altogether appropriate. She was, indeed, acting as a barometer, registering the moral state of the nation during the spring of 1973. It is difficult to think of an English housewife being interviewed outside Buckingham Palace at the time of one of our periodic ministerial sexual scandals and publicly weeping at the thought of the contrast between the

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beauty of the monument to Queen Victoria and the moral turpitude of the British government.

Yet the reaction of those American writers who left their country in the 1920s to get away from the scandals of the Harding and Coolidge Administrations was fundamentally the same as that of the publicized tearful touristic lady. American lives are, in some way difficult for a European to understand, transparent to the public state of the nation.

During the late sixties the horrors of the war in Vietnam affected many young Americans as drastically as if they had convinced themselves that they were possessed by demons whom they had to exorcise before they would ever be able to experience their own humanity. Through the ceremonial burning of draft cards and through private rites of sex and communal living and smoking marijuana they achieved, within the group, those expressions of anguished personal values which made them abhorrent to the public nation. Their feelings about Vietnam merged with those that they had about pollution, until they finally persuaded themselves that America was doomed to self-destruction. Hatred of the America of President Johnson became almost a religion with them. As one of them said to me: "This country's certain to destroy itself, if not by the war, then by pollution from all the fumes." They opted out of the country of bombs and hygiene, and adopted a regimen of protest, "love," and not washing.

At the same time, they blamed their behavior onto the conditions of the war and corruption in American life. They regarded themselves as a kind of punishment to America for its being what it was, and they did not have to look for any further explanation of them. Their belief even in "the revolution" was based on the idea that America would produce it inevitably as a punishment for its wickedness, which also accounted for them.

The trouble though with a "sick" generation that attributes its sickness to the conditions surrounding it, is that it has no standards by which to criticize a later generation which may produce quite opposite symptoms as a reaction to scarcely altered social circumstances. Sickness is all. One year the social conditions produce "revolution"; the following year they produce a cynical conformism or apathy, a state of disillusionment.

One excuse for the switch from protest to conformism was that

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the revolution, on account of some oversight on someone's part, did not seem to happen. The drop-outs, as an ultimate expression of their disgust with the society, dropped out from dropping out. Thus the Johnson era led into the curious listlessness, among the young (who of course were not quite the same young), of the Nixon era against whose scandals (far worse than those of Harding and Coolidge) they scarcely protested.

The New York Times published (April 30, 1973) a letter from an ex-student which seems representative of listlessness. In her account of the reversal of behavior of her generation the only thing that has not changed is the tendency to attribute the writer's reactions to the sickness of the society:

> We were politically active in the 1968 Presidential campaign and again in the 1972 Presidential campaign. Both times we were defeated. Throughout the 1960's we demonstrated to end the war in Vietnam; again we were defeated. . . . And now Watergate; our failure to react to this outrage is based not on apathy but on the knowledge that any action we might take would bring no result.

The writer draws the moral that "the students today live in a state of disillusionment." However exasperated one may feel by her arguments, her conclusion is correct. What is revealing is the way in which "protest" and "disillusion" are taken to be opposite sides of the same medal, minted by the political system which — the writer seems to feel — ought to have granted the students a Eugene McCarthy or a George McGovern as President, just to stop them getting disillusioned. That the individual student is, at one phase of history, in revolt and, at another, disillusioned, is blamed on the public nation.

* * *

English writers are, as I have pointed out, drawn to the United States by its immediately contemporary energy, just as American writers were, a hundred years ago, drawn to Europe by its past. Yet although American material greatness is always in some sense energetic, on the level of its civilization the energy has to struggle against what I can only call the still greater force of inertia. America has, spiritually, the energy of its inertia and the inertia of its energy. Energy and inertia are interrelated, negative and positive poles of the civilization.

The force of the inertia arises from the exposure of individual consciousness and values to the public state of the nation. Sensitive,

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intelligent, creative people in the United States feel that they are, as I have pointed out, in their lives transparent to the immensely powerful political and economic forces which run the country, the nation which obliterates the *patria*. To take an example (which, although in itself not significant, is nevertheless typical), while writing these pages I go into the faculty lounge of the university where I have been teaching, and overhear a conversation between some younger colleagues. One remarks that she feels tainted by the corruption revealed in the Watergate scandal. Another says that he is determined to try to get a job which will take him out of this country. He adds that the corruption of American life is so insidious that he feels he cannot fight it. He would almost prefer to live under a completely repressive authoritarian system where it would at least be possible to make some significant protest which would be recognized as objectionable by the authorities. This remark made me reflect that the speaker could not know much about totalitarianism. It reminded me though of something I had heard Robert Lowell say at a meeting in New York, during the era of President Johnson, when he was introducing the Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky, who was giving a public reading of his poetry, to his audience: "The governments of both the countries in which we are poets are bad, but sometimes a poet in this country can almost envy a Russian poet, because in your country the government takes what poets write and say seriously enough to wish to suppress them."

With Lowell, as with my young colleague at the university in the Midwest, one could feel a certain frivolity in his expressed nostalgia for outright tyranny. However such remarks should be understood as attempts to define the exasperated frustration felt by the American of sensibility, his awareness of the state of the nation in which he feels terribly implicated, while yet unable to do anything about it. The writer feels that the government has involved him in that corruption which is "America." Yet, while granting him freedom of expression, it refuses to recognize his opposition as a factor to be taken into consideration. Between the millstones of the public consciousness to which he is so exposed and of his own private agony, he fails to communicate to anyone except those who feel exactly as he does.

The authorities provide American writers with honors, money,

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flattery. The one thing they do not do is take their work seriously, because literature is not an influence within the area of public consideration and policy. No one feels challenged by it in the way that the authorities in Russia — so successful in crushing their writers — nevertheless do feel challenged. In Europe, writers probably do not expect to have considerable public influence but they do feel that they are able to influence individual readers who make up a society in which, though there is a great difference between the public and the private spheres of influence, there is not an absolute division.

Yet in the United States power is not an abstraction, nor is it represented by men who seem made out of some special kind of material — granite, iron, or teak — left aside by the Deity on the last day of the Creation, for the purpose of making Russian bureaucrats. American presidents, senators, and congressmen are human beings, but in order to attain office they have to act in ways which, through money, local interests, favor, intrigue, will lead to power. The higher the office the less room for any interest which is not directed toward power. The amount of money required, the pressure of local interest which has to be served, the number of favors which must be gained, are all greater than in other democracies. This does not mean that outstanding, disinterested, and highly intelligent men do not go into politics in America, but it does mean that most of them have special qualities of drive lacking in other men. They are neither superhuman nor inhuman, but a special kind of being, like people who have been multiplied by an unaccountable factor *X*, a rare variety of the human species, kept in a zoo called Washington, D.C.

There is a dim, subterranean flirtation between imagination and power in Washington in which imagination is forced into the role of the rejected and humiliated (intellect in the form of Harvard professors who become presidential advisers occasionally attains the status of high-class prostitute). Robert Frost was asked to read a poem at the inauguration of President Kennedy (the nearest ruler to the Emperor Augustus — with Robert Lowell for his Catullus). A distinguished poet who was made poetry consultant at the Library of Congress during Eisenhower's presidency told me that he considered himself a cultural ambassador who, through the mediation of Russian poets of his acquaintance, would effect a reconciliation between the

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United States and the Soviet Union. Poets sometimes nurse delusions of grandeur.

* * *

America has the inertia of its energy and the energy of its inertia. The feeling that they are struggling through a viscous, gluey substance made up of materialism, power, and public indifference, compels writers and artists to dramatically strenuous efforts. The inertia is countered by the energy, but too often it saps it. Ernest Hemingway wondered why it was so difficult for American writers to develop beyond the point reached in their often extraordinarily original early work. The reason may be that struggling forward against the backward pull of the forces of inertia, the writer or artist, having gained some money, acclaim, and public approval, is in the position of having to use all his energy to remain where he is. He has none over with which to advance further.

One cause of inertia in the United States is that the country does not have a center in which the creative life fuses with the active economic and political life, as France and England have in Paris and London. New York, as we are often reminded, is not America. It is cosmopolitan and, although having accents, style, and extraordinary vitality all its own, it is a host city to parasitic foreign geniuses who become, as it were, honorary New Yorkers, but who are not required to become Americans and who can, if they so wish, happily remain foreigners, exotic gaily-colored parakeets perched on this rock of Manhattan Island. Surrealist painters from France, composers from Central Europe, conductors, actors, instrumentalists, have all flaunted their feathers in New York. W. H. Auden was as much a New Yorker as he was British, but he was not at all American.

There have been attempts, more or less serious, at various times to establish centers of cultural life other than New York. For example, in the 1950s San Francisco seemed about to become the center of the West Coast culture, looking as much across the Pacific to Asia as to the interior, the Great Plains and the Midwest. This did not happen. The Beatniks and other near-mystics of the San Francisco culture (or cults) found that it was simpler to go to India and Japan than to set up their shrines in San Francisco. Similarly the effort to make Chicago a great center of cultural life of the "real" America, which seemed so serious and so justified in the early part of the cen-

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tury, collapsed. Saul Bellow points out (in a very interesting essay, published in the May 1973 *The Chicago Guide*) that from the 1880s to the 1920s Chicago was really the capital of the Midwest, where the newspaper reporters and journalists were men like Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Ring Lardner. (One may add that with the founding of *Poetry* which had Harriet Monroe as its editor and Ezra Pound as its roving European correspondent, Chicago had claims at least equal with those of New York to be the center of the modern movement in poetry.) There were and are also, of course, great art collections there. But as Saul Bellow points out "Chicago did not remain a capital. It lost out to New York and, in part, to California. Writers went east and west. The excitement passed. Our section of the country began to export exiles. These exiles abandoned the city to the boorish, aggressively militant, dull middle-class."

* * *

The foreigner can become a New Yorker which means remaining a foreigner — or a kind of foreigner squared — his original nationality retained — and yet a New Yorker. In the rest of the country, English writers find themselves in the position of either remaining spectators (Europeans a bit Americanized) or of becoming completely American.

English writers like Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and Auden who have gone to America, have observed it brilliantly but nearly always continued to look at it from the outside — even when they have adopted American nationality — and, for the most part, to be looked at from the outside by Americans. In an interview (published in the Spring 1969 *Harvard Advocate*) John Berryman stated that he thought of Auden as a British poet who "came over here and pretended to be an American for some years." Berryman recounted an anecdote of Auden speaking at the National Institute of Art and Letters and beginning his address, "We in England feel . . ." "But then," Berryman relates, "he suddenly remembered that it was the *American* Institute of Art and Letters!"

Auden returned to the Oxford college where he had been an undergraduate, where he seemed more New Yorker than Oxfordian. Isherwood in *A Single Man*, arguably his best novel, lays his scene in Los Angeles, but his hero is a British immigrant, teaching in an American college. Isherwood sees his Los Angeles characters through

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British eyes. In 1971 he published a memoir, *Kathleen and Frank,* based on the journals and letters of his father and mother, and extending from the end of the last century to the 1950s, a book which documents the period of history described in the novels of Forster and Virginia Woolf, up to the time of the visit of Isherwood to the ruins of Wyberslegh Hall, in 1956, the house where his grandparents and parents lived and where he spent much of his childhood.

There is a feeling here, as in the partial return of Auden to England, of the wheel come full circle, as though the significance of the ex-patriotism of these two English writers was to understand America and then to come back at a later stage of their lives to a better understanding of the England that they had rejected. The English and the American experience remain however very separate, as they do also in the novels of Aldous Huxley. They do not assimilate one another.

There is not, and probably cannot now be, an Anglo-American literature, written by English writers living in the United States, the twentieth-century counterpart of that which James envisaged a hundred years ago. The English writer either disappears into American literature — as has happened with the poet Denise Levertov — or remains outside it: unless he remains outside both England and America, as seems the case with Thom Gunn in his recent poetry.

Another poet, Donald Davie, has gone to Stanford College, from where he has written a book, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry,* which seems the result of understanding his own country the better by viewing it from a distance. In this book, he sees recent English poetry (that of Philip Larkin) in the role of precursor of the situation of the imagination in an industrialized society in which nature is almost completely destroyed. "English poetry is the first," Davie writes, which, with Wordsworth, "expressed ideas of elemental sanctity and natural piety; and it seems it must be English poetry which asks what to do with these ideas in a landscape where virtually all the sanctuaries have been violated, all the pieties blasphemed." He sees also that this situation although worse perhaps in England than in any other country is really a representative one because other countries are well on their way to becoming completely industrialized and suburbanized.

* * *

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So when America gained that "immense advantage" which Emerson, in the course of their walk near Stonehenge, prophesied to Carlyle more than a hundred years ago, the result was not a future symmetrical with the European past: this in spite of the fact that there was always in the minds of English lecturers, and of Americans being lectured to, the idea of such a future; when Americans had "grown up" and the nation had "caught up," perhaps by means of transporting in ever larger quantities, impedimenta of European art and architecture across the Atlantic. The idea lingers on in Edmund Wilson's *A Piece of My Mind* where Wilson, writing after the Second World War, points out that Europeans were no longer in the position to boast about the superiority of their culture, because most of its contemporary achievements, together with the thinkers and artists responsible for them, were now in the United States.

The metaphor of a transatlantic weighing-scale with material of civilization gradually being removed from the Eastern pan into the Western, until the American tips the balance, does not describe the ascendancy. The new civilization did not entirely come into its inheritance until it had absorbed the European tradition and then transformed it into something uniquely American in which Europeans were forced to recognize the achieved transatlantic future that they had been anticipating for two hundred years. In literature the process of absorption and transformation began of course early on, but recognition of it by the English was delayed until the 1920s. The really spectacular liquefaction of a European tradition into an American transformation scene was in painting. The American school, or schools, of painting that emerged in the 1950s had absorbed the influences of the modern tradition, from Monet to Picasso and the French surrealists, and transformed them into a style which has no European precedent, in works which reflect the scale of American geography, the excitement of great plains and cities, the technique which competes with the skills and efficiency of Boeing and General Motors, and which establish "the tradition of the New."

So the "immense advantage" was realized as the confrontation of the world with a civilization which had absorbed many of the achievements of the old and transformed them into terms of its own newness. The "newness" of this civilization lies precisely in rejection of the past except when this has been abstracted into ideas entering

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into a contemporary debate. All pasts are converted into chemical nutritious matter for the devouring appetite for the present. Existing always within the present moment and without resort to a past outside it from which the present can be viewed, the civilization forms a whole of diverse infighting forces of energy and inertia which nevertheless are one in being brought together within the unity of the present. This struggle which is of the very nature of American civilization becomes conscious in the work of writers and artists who give expression to everything that happens in America *now*.

Until quite recently (when this has perhaps become impossible) European civilization meant the extension into the present of the continuity of the past tradition. The identification of civilization with the past of the tradition surviving into the present, had two main results in Europe. The first was that contemporary life was seen by many poets and critics as consisting of two worlds on different levels of time, and though mutually antagonistic, not really related: one of the past, the other of the present. The past, whose survival was affirmed in traditions, unspoiled nature, cultural monuments, and the social hierarchy, was a world less abstract, impersonal, and distracted than the modern one and therefore felt by its devotees to be realer, more concrete, in the whole history of human experience, more alive. It represented values which were those of religion, of man, of nature, of art, values which were not those of perpetual self-transformation of machinery into other machinery, those of Progress.

But, secondly, this insistence on the past as the goal of civilization meant that, given the circumstances, it was a receding goal, moving backwards, against the contemporary world which was advancing (progressing) with ever-increasing rapidity. Thus to those who sought the receding goal of the diminishing past civilization, the modern was the world which moved in the opposite direction to the civilized. It was, in fact, anticivilization. If civilization implied, as Matthew Arnold thought it did, the Platonic idea of "very and true life" then the modern world implied the opposite. What it called progress meant regress, what is called values, the lack of them, what it called life, death:

We are the hollow men,
We are the stuffed men.

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In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England the losing forces of civilization and the gaining forces of technology moved in opposite directions, but they did not meet in that dialectic of opposites speaking the same language, which later produced modern art. They were not on speaking terms. Matthew Arnold's cultural criticism in his *The Civilization of the United States* is an example of this pursuit of separate goals along lines that do not really meet. He divides the English into the aristocrats, who are barbarians, the middle class, who are philistines, and the populace who are — the populace. The Americans are, the majority of them, a middle class and therefore, by English definition, philistines. They are in need of being told (and Matthew Arnold tells them) that what "really dissatisfies in American civilization is the want of the *interesting*." For it is the *interesting* which makes for culture and civilization.

The use of the word *interesting* here is doubly revealing. Firstly, from the standpoint of the culture of "sweetness and light" of "elevation" and "nobility" going back to Plato, Arnold is quite right and it is courageous of him to inform his American contemporaries that they are, like his English middle-class ones, bores. But, secondly, Arnold's assumption that when America did acquire civilization the "interesting" element in it would be the European past as conveyed in a lecture to his hosts by Matthew Arnold, shows how little consideration he had given to the proposition that this civilization would have to be largely the result of the transformation of energies peculiar to the unprecedented situation of the people of that country. He did not think this about America because he did not think it about that new contemporary world which was modern life, totally alien to him, in England.

In the event, American civilization consists not so much of the humanization of the society, as in the expression of violent conflicts between the personal and impersonal elements in it, realized in art forms or formlessness in which the personal attains a precarious and often hysterical victory.

It is revealing that Arnold attributes to the uncivilized forces in the society qualities of virility, masculinity, energy — barbarism, philistinism, the populace — whilst to the civilizing forces he attributes weak and feminine ones.

* * *

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Nostalgia is the spiritual sickness of those who identify civilization with the past unrelated to the present. It is easy then to see why in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries those English writers who identified civilization with the European past were the most nostalgic: forever dreaming of life in the medieval monastry where religion, literature, scholarship, and a beautiful simplicity were interwoven into a pattern of lived ritual; of the knights of the Round Table; of the Athens of Socrates; of the Florence of Michelangelo; of the English seventeenth century before the period of John Donne and the supposed "dissociation of sensibility"; of the English village, the wheelwright's shop, and the "organic community."

To penetrate the European civilization was to embark on a sacred voyage like that of Odysseus going down into the underworld to converse with the dead — the journey which Ezra Pound celebrates in the first of his *Cantos*.

James, Pound, and Eliot, looking at the European civilization from their side of the Atlantic saw it as having centers in Paris, London, and Rome. Comparing it with provincial America, and not (until the First World War) with its own past, they were far less inclined than English writers to be nostalgic about it. Looking back today at this American-European literature it seems to have a heroic quality, on account of the brave attempt of these writers to state the past of the tradition as contemporary values confronting the modern world on its own terms. The characters in Henry James's novels are central to the life surrounding them. Although they do not speak its language they speak an invented language of poetry and sophistication which is as intelligent as that of the world of science. Moreover, these characters, as aristocrats, plutocrats, members of the ruling class, move in the contemporary world of wealth and politics. Without his inventing a "modernist" style James fortifies the world of his fiction by introducing into his European material his American characters, who are by no means nostalgic.

From the point of view which I am here considering of writing about the past civilization without catching the sickness of nostalgia, the modernism of Pound and Eliot might be seen as an attempt to smuggle the values of the past onto the modern scene by putting them into machines of form and idiom which are equipped to deal with the modern world. The whole past of the tradition is present in their

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writing, but in order to get there it has to prove that it has some stinging relevance to the modern scene, that it is not just there in order to indulge poet and reader in nostalgic dreaming. But at the same time while the past retains its pastness, it does not go through that abstractifying process of so much modern critical writing, which consists of translating a past concreteness into a contemporary concept.

Nevertheless, the view of James and Pound and Eliot was that the values of civilization were those of the past. Their writing and criticism was a very up-to-date defense system of those values by modernizing them while retaining their historic integrity and without dissolving them into the terms of the present. But their social attitudes showed that despite the modernism of their style, to them civilization represented the past values which had to be defended: the literary modernism was merely a sophisticated system of defense.

Just as much as the nostalgic English writers, they saw Europe as divided into the forces of the past that made for civilization and those of the present that were against it. Their literature depended upon their maintaining those past values. All they hoped of the fundamentally alien modern world was that somehow it might be persuaded into employing its modern techniques for defending the past. The economic and political power of contemporary Europe was justified in their eyes only by its innate conservatism, its resistance to the modern, its hierarchic social institutions which, in their own interest, defended anachronisms. Henry James and Edith Wharton saw the First World War simply as a conflict between civilization (primarily the French tradition) and German barbarism. Eliot, after the war, identified the collapse of the traditional civilization with that of the whole society. Pound fell into the tragic error of supporting Fascism because he thought that Mussolini wished, in his economic planning, to return to a phase of the European economy which preceded the introduction of the system of usury. The poetry which could go back several centuries, take up a theme of some Provençal troubadour, and turn it into a modern poem became in his mind an analogue for what Mussolini was doing with the social system.

The failure of members of the American "lost generation" in the 1920s to get away from what they regarded as the barbarism of their country into the past of the European civilization, indicates that the past, considered as traditions of the lives of the dead which

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were continuous within the present — palpable as nature, architecture, and manners — had died. It continued only in literature and as subjects of academic study in universities. America now became the center of the civilization whose main characteristic was the continuous transformation of all lived experience into arts whose values were entirely contemporary. Knowledge of the past could be absorbed into this contemporary creative consciousness, but only as contemporary knowledge, not as providing standpoints of outsideness from which the contemporary world could be viewed. Many American poets (Wallace Stevens, Charles Olson, John Berryman, Robert Lowell) were considerably learned, but they assimilated and absorbed the material of their knowledge in work expressive of their contemporary situation to which the past offered no alternative:

The earth for us is flat and bare.
There are no shadows. Poetry

Exceeding music must take the place
Of empty heaven and its hymns,

Ourselves in poetry must take their place,
Even in the chattering of your guitar.

Wallace Stevens evokes the past only to reject it as an alternative to that reality of the present situation which he makes the meeting point of his imagination with the reality that goes into his poetry.

* * *

Above, I quoted Donald Davie as writing of the situation of England as a completely industrialized and suburbanized country and anticipating a situation which will undoubtedly arise with other countries. With the abolition of the past and the ruination of the countryside, poetry has to draw on the reality of the contemporary situation and the relationship of the individual writer to this. The civilization has to continually transform immediate situations into language, forms, and art which express them.

Today the difference between the English and American civilization is no longer the qualitative one between the country that has a past tradition and the one that lacks it. The difference is now quantitative: that between the country which is the center of power and wealth in the area of the common language and the one which has

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become peripheral. The energy of the American civilization results from its writers and artists having to deal with situations which are more pressing, more complex than those in England. America is the country where more contemporary life is happening and where things are on a larger scale.

When writers regarded the difference between America and Europe as being qualitative — Europe having the advantage of its past dimension — they rather overlooked the importance of the fact that Europe was also the center of world power and wealth. James and Eliot overlooked this because material strength was a phenomenon of contemporary noncivilization. Their attention was fixed on the past which made the values of civilization. Contemporary power only concerned them in that it provided the necessary, rather regrettable machinery by which the past was sustained. In his letters James is always rueful when he finds evidence of the British neglecting their imperial interests. This is not because he considers power as civilization, but because he thinks the British Empire so much more civilized than any empire likely to succeed it.

But with the death of the past tradition the center of civilization becomes simply the country which has the greatest power. For it contains the greatest complexity of contemporary situations in life with which the imagination has to deal. This does not mean, of course, that power becomes moral or civilized. On the contrary, the greater the power — the active materialist inertia — the greater the opposition to it of the civilizing energies in the society, which are those of a counterculture. The two greatest powers in the world today, America and Russia, have in their contemporary literature the most significant countercultures, made all the more energetic by the strength of the materialism to which they are opposed.

In the area of the Anglo-American common language today the difference between the English and the American civilization is not that one has the past tradition and the other lacks it, but that America, being far more powerful, in the most materialist sense, than Britain has a far more vigorous counterculture. Both countries belong to the same situation of exposure to the forces of the contemporary world, from which the past no longer provides relief. But the pressure of these forces is greater in the United States.

The first reaction of the English to this situation was, I have

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suggested, toward a self-conscious provincialism. Although this reaction was a just and reasonable one, it implied a withdrawal into one corner of an overriding Anglo-American situation, the particular English locality, and an unwillingness to look outside this. The results were sometimes very rewarding, for example the poetry of Philip Larkin. However I think that in its insistence on the locality of the English scene, there is a sense of something blinkered about this poetry, a concentration on what is happening to the place in England, an altogether admirable insistence on the values to be derived from such an imposed limitation, but a refusal to look beyond this to the areas of wider consciousness which include America. This is not just a question of traveling to the United States or of staying in England, it is a matter of what is happening to English consciousness through the predominance now of the American area of the language, and through the great vitality of American literature in dealing with the overriding situation of contemporary forces influencing life.

England is that part of the area of the common language which is distant from the center of the contemporary civilization and which retains some sense of the past of the shared tradition. Distance implies a certain outsideness which previously was gained by going back into the past of the tradition. Where outsideness was historical it is now geographical. People move around in different areas of space instead of different times.

Today, owing to the death of the past tradition as nature and objects which can be concretely experienced and the increased pressure of the forces of the contemporary world, the need to get outside the civilization, to distance oneself from it, is felt acutely by many Americans. England is a place where they can realize this. At first sight, such journeys may seem very superficial, mere escapism from the pressure of political horrors, the rejection by a latter-day "lost generation" of notorious corruptions and scandals.

However, I think that the *mouvementé* Anglo-American relationship corresponds to the fact that England and America are enclosed within the same overriding modern situation in which America is at the center of its violence, England on the circumference. The relationship today is not one of European past and American contemporaneity, but of scale. The America that has to be imagined is, from the point of view of the poet, almost uncontainable. Hence the

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sense of strain and effort or of the floodgates being opened and consciousness overwhelmed in much contemporary American poetry. For the poet to go to England or Europe now is not to make a journey into the past civilization, but to go to places where life, although threatened by the inevitably encroaching situation of total raiding by all the forces of the contemporaneous technological society, is still measured on the scale of the individual.

Thus "getting away from this country" for Americans of sensibility is not just escapism. It is an attempt to restore the human scale to their view of events. Of course, by getting away I don't mean, in all cases, physical journeying. The mind itself can provide its maps.

For Americans the danger of trying to write out of a realization of the American scale of the contemporaneous is that it leads to wild exaggeration of the personal experience of the writer in order to measure his own life against the forces which have inhuman proportions. The danger for the individual personality is very real and has led to tragedies of collapse, insanity, and suicide. For the English the danger is provincialism, that is, of treating the local situation as a special separate local case, whereas really today it exists within the wider situation of the whole area of the common language, and, beyond that, of the world.

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STORIES

Joyce Carol Oates

PASSIONS AND MEDITATIONS

6 October

Dear Keith Lurie:

Let me say at once that I have never written a letter like this before — but this is not simply a letter of admiration. I have a double purpose. First, just to thank you for your exciting, unforgettable work — parts of "American Cosmos" will show the way forward to young American composers, after the sterile cul-de-sac of so much of contemporary music — it is quite as iconoclastic, and as rich, as Ives! — and, second, I am putting together a detailed study of American culture, tentatively titled PASSIONS & MEDITATIONS: EIGHT YOUNG ARTISTS, and I wonder if I might interview you. I realize that your schedule is a crowded one and that, perhaps, you receive many requests for interviews. But I hope you will find time for me. My knowledge of music may only be that of a devoted layman, but my appreciation is limitless!

I found your speech last Friday at the Academy not only brilliant but inspiring. (I managed to get a ticket for the program through an old professor of mine at City College — Morris Gruber, whom perhaps you remember? You took a course in European history from him in 1961, and received a grade of A — naturally! — he looked up your grades in his grade-book for that year, which he still has. Professor Gruber is another fan of yours and asks to be remembered to you.) I agree with your remarks about freshness and innovation, but I'm afraid I must question your statement that "there is no tradition, only memory." Perhaps I failed to grasp your meaning, but it

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seems to me that much of the experimentation of recent years — Baxterhouse's* "Symphony for Silence," for example, and all of the electronic pieces — are simply admissions of defeat. We don't need more experimentation or apologists for it!

My admiration for your work is immense, and I hope to bring your name to a wider public. Of course you are quite famous among those of us who follow closely all new developments in the arts, but the average American — unfortunately — has yet to hear of you. Could we get together next week for a few hours of conversation? My number is 945-0095 and I will be waiting hopefully for your call.

Sincerely,
Roberta Brightmore

*I just realized that Ezra Baxterhouse is a friend of yours — I hope you won't take offense at this remark!

11 October

Dear Keith Lurie:

I am writing to inquire whether you can set aside an hour or two for an interview (tape-recorded, if this is agreeable to you). I am working on a detailed critical study of your work. Please contact me at 945-0095, any day after 5:30.

Perhaps I should introduce myself: I am a young woman (26), a serious student of contemporary culture, born and educated in New York, whose quiet and even monastic life allows her an objectivity sadly lacking in many of our "professional" critics and reviewers (I wrote an angry, devastating letter in reply to Donald Sullivan's ignorant and cruel dismissal of your work, in *The New York Times* last month, but I am still waiting for the letter to be published). I think our meeting might be enjoyed on both sides, and I promise not to ask you any embarrassing questions!

(I did write you a similar letter on October 6, but I understand that you might have been out of town, or could find no time in your busy schedule to call me.)

Sincerely,
Roberta Brightmore

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21 October

Dear Mr. Lurie:

Having waited hopefully but futilely for your reply, I would like to explain myself a little more. I am not — repeat, *not* — an ordinary seeker after the talented and illustrious. As I said at the outset of our correspondence, I have never before written a "fan" letter (and hardly anticipate doing so again); indeed, my desire to talk with you is purely professional. As I am at this moment working on a lengthy analytical study of your work, it can hardly be said that my appeals to you have been mere "fan" (I detest that ugly term). Perhaps you have misunderstood.

Is it possible that you are so deluged with awards (the recent Academy grant was richly deserved — but why did they wait so long to give it to you?) and invitations and congratulations and offers of various types (beyond my ability even to imagine, I suppose) that you cannot recognize a legitimate inquiry when it arrives? Or is your mail scanned by a secretary, who has only a superficial concern for your career and a limited awareness of what might truly advance it? It is something of a tragedy, I have always believed, that sensitive, dedicated people with much in common can be separated, perhaps forever, by middle parties with no clear grasp of what they are doing.

Please let me hear from you — I will be home all weekend, awaiting your call.

Very sincerely yours,
Roberta Brightmore

26 October

Dear Mr. Lurie:

Why didn't you call?

I am very disappointed but I guess I understand.

Let me explain further: it isn't just your work I admire, but you yourself, the personality I sense behind that rigid, careful face of yours. It is not a handsome face, but strong, powerful, commanding — it speaks of a titanic soul. Have you read Edgeware's biography of Beethoven? There are uncanny similarities between you and that great, unhappy man.

Enclosed is a pen-and-ink drawing based on one of your photographs. I thought it might amuse or interest you, and I would ap-

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preciate it very much if you would autograph it and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope. My drawing abilities leave much to be desired, I'm afraid, but the picture does you justice, I think (though even the photograph doesn't convey the moody power of your eyes).

Thank you!

Gratefully,
Roberta Brightmore

1 November

Keith Lurie:

No need to pretend you've been out of town. Or to imagine that I think so. I happen to have seen you in person three times during the past week — merely sitting in the park across from your apartment building, without being especially on the alert for you. I spent some profitable hours in that park, quite peaceful, even rather content, turning over and over in my mind the folly and cruelty of human relationships.

Perhaps you don't believe that I actually saw you (in your Olympian detachment!) — but I can enumerate the occasions.

1. Wed. 5:30 P.M. Left a taxi, entered your building. Wearing a dark trench coat, shoes of fawn-colored suede (or some other soft material), carrying a brown leather briefcase and a small brown bag (liquor? — groceries?) I wondered if I should approach you; I lost my nerve, of course. The taxi driver was waiting to make a U-turn, so on a sudden impulse (I sometimes do things like this, amazing myself — but then, life is not logical) I ran over to him and got into the cab. I had him drive me home, though I could hardly afford it! The driver was quite a pleasant fellow. I asked him if he had recognized you — no — didn't even know the name "Keith Lurie" — guessed you might be a prize-fighter or a football player (!) — so I set him straight. I explained that he had just driven home one of America's (the world's?) finest composers, who, at the incredible age of 32, has such unlimited promise that we may anticipate another Stravinsky in our midst. I hardly mean to flatter or to embarrass you — but this happens to be true.

2. Thurs. 10:45 A.M. Leaving your apartment, in a hurry, wearing a bright rust-colored tweed outfit, vest and all (English-

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made?) possibly bought on your trip to London last spring?), carrying that same briefcase, which I imagine is stuffed with material you are working on. Your hair was damp (from a shower? — I try to visualize you doing such ordinary, mundane things!) and you wore sunglasses with wide black frames. Are they prescription lenses? I noticed at the Academy that you wore blue-tinted glasses, though it was evening. I wear glasses myself; my eyes are fairly good, even after years of abusing them through overwork, but occasionally my left eyeball seems to tug, the muscles pull oddly. No pain, but it's a frightening sensation.

3. Friday. 11:30 A.M. Again, descending the steps quickly (there are twelve steps, an even dozen), as if you were late for an appointment. I was waiting out on the sidewalk, unobtrusively and patiently. I had been imagining you for some time — seeing your image there, approaching the glass doors of your building — how disappointed I was when other men appeared, middle-aged, ugly, without your special radiance! Then at eleven-thirty you finally appeared, hurrying, in a dark green corduroy jacket, a yellow and white striped shirt and an elegant dotted tie, passing so close to me that the dots of your necktie danced in my eyes, making me dizzy. I could smell your shaving lotion, we were so close! It was fresh, the odor of trees and meadows. Your trousers were dark brown, your shoe-boots dark leather, ah, what grace even in the way you hurried, saying good morning to the doorman (a very fine old man, whom I've chatted with) and glancing at me, almost smiling, I think, though you were obviously late for wherever you were going and I was a total stranger to you. Yet — did you recognize something in my face? — my expression? I was stunned at our sudden closeness though I had been waiting for two hours, somehow it all happened so quickly — you came and went so quickly. I stood there like a fool, unable to speak. After you had gotten in the cab I came awake and wanted to lean in the window and say, "Mr. Lurie — may I share this taxi with you?" Would you have minded? What would you have said?

I walked 25 blocks home.

Disgusted at my own meekness, my fear. Back to my non-doorman-manned dump, climbed up to the fifth floor, let myself in, stood in my tiny bathroom for half an hour, staring at my face — Why? Why? Some are born to beauty and power (like you — even your

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thinning hair won't make you appear weak) some are born to — well, not ugliness, not monstrosity — but to neutrality, weakness, nullity, nothing. Why?

In the universe there are stars in which all nuclear fuel is burned up, all energy dissipated into space, stars that then turn in upon themselves, becoming dense to infinity, crushing in upon themselves. . . . Helplessly, forever, they turn in upon themselves until they are points in space. No light can come out of them: the light is dragged back into them by their powerful gravity. They have collapsed to points, to the point of a pencil, they are dead, more than dead, black holes in which everything stops. I am one of those black holes. A point of consciousness condensed in upon itself. The black holes are all dead and cannot communicate with other black holes. Why? Certain bodies of energy continue to live and to give off light. They are propelled through the universe as if alive. Why? Why are some of us dead and others alive, why am I a point of silence and neutrality and you a being of light, always in a hurry, always with a destination? Why is the world put together this way?

I stand grinning into my six-by-eight inch mirror, accepting my fate. What else can I do? All my life I have *accepted*. The world is divided into those who accept, and those who act and live and stride forward and brush past others. If I slashed open an artery in honor of you ("this is my Body and my Blood, etc.") would you take notice? If I told you that I would perform this act at noon, Sunday, November 14, would you try to stop me? Would you at least be aware of the clock on that day, watching as noon approached?

Would you give a damn?

You won't telephone me or reply to my letters. You won't pay attention to me. These declarations of love — so frank, sincere, undisguised — these mean nothing to you. Couldn't take five seconds to autograph that drawing of you, though I worked on it for days, discarding a dozen attempts. I enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope but you must have thrown everything away. You or your secretary, who stands between us.

Men like you are arrogant bastards. Beneath the melody of your music (which is often derivative) is the heavy dull throb of Ego, Ego, selfish Ego.

R. Brightmore

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9 November

Dear Keith:

I have the power to enter the back doors of lives. A hole in space, a black hole, is invisible. I can let myself in the door of your apartment (eighth floor, but *not* facing the park, is it? very expensive and yet antiquated and drafty, isn't it?) and wander through the rooms, wherever I want to go. I have to imagine the carpeting in the hall: probably new, thick, bought when you moved in a year ago. Dark green, maybe. Dark brown. The rug on my floor is from Woolworth's, straggly and "modern," hunter green. I don't compare the two of us, you with your family's money and me with nothing (my father taught high school in Queens but died when I was a child), you with your "prodigious talent" and me with nothing. I don't compare your bedroom — with those high, elegant windows and drapes, the expensive furniture — and this room of mine, one single room, a bed I don't bother to make up. In your bedroom I would walk on tiptoe, as if in a sacred place. I would go to the closet and open the door, gently, and thrust my face into it, to breathe the odor of your clothes, seize one of your jackets and press my hot face against it. *You,* you are present in my hands and my head, a proud prisoner in my imagination. *You.* You cannot escape.

You refuse to answer my letters. Why?

Ought I to have typed them? But typing is so formal and impersonal, so bleak. If you read my handwriting you are already close to me — almost intimate with me.

Or do you sense how your silence teases me, inspires me? The building in which I live smells of sewage, and overhead someone is walking heavily, back and forth, a television set is blaring, children are yelling, and yet I feel fierce tonight, strangely omnipotent. I don't know why. I think I am transported out of my own life by the contemplation of you. Let that bastard walk upstairs, making my ceiling and walls vibrate, let the children yell, I am free of them tonight. I am free because of you.

This is my theory: by reading my letters, by scanning this line as you are, quickly, impatiently, perhaps nervously (because you don't know what I might say next, do you?), even by ripping open the

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envelope which I have so carefully and lovingly sealed, you have opened the back door of your life to me.

You pretend not to see the shadowy figure that has slipped in through the door. You pretend there is no one there. Upon your bed I will lie, submissive as an animal laid upon an altar, with my eyes lightly closed, waiting for you to return. . . . I am not a match for you, pound for pound. But I could be equal to you. Don't doubt me. You may pretend that you have not allowed me in the back door of your life, but never doubt me. That would be a mistake.

(next morning)

. . . I want to tell you about something that happened seven years ago, in London. I never told anyone about this. I was traveling alone during the summer, without much money, and I spent a week in a small hotel near Russell Square. I brought back to that hotel with me a young man with your build and face — that lanky Lincoln-like type, so American and artless, and almost homely but not quite — and he stayed the night willingly, but in the morning began asking me for money. Started talking in a loud voice. I panicked, was nearly sick with the shame and the suspense and I whispered, "Please don't, please," I begged him to leave. Gave him money but he wanted more . . . and how he grinned at me, pitiless at my terror, an American kid in his twenties who'd been bumming around Europe for a year, living off people like me, helpless with our love. . . . Ah, how I did love him, and wept when he left!

Yes, you resemble him, though you're older than he was and less striking. Your skin looks a little rough — acne scars? I don't mind. I like your hair, though it's thinning. I like your clothes. I would dress myself up as your twin if I had the money — how unfortunate we all can't have rich parents, a member of the board of A.T.&T. for a father! But my own clothes are nothing to be ashamed of, I want to reassure you. They are decent and tasteful enough. I emerge from my ugly little room like a butterfly from a cocoon . . . bright with hope, my eyes shining with the prospect of another day, so many empty hours that might be filled, like magic, with bursts of joy. . . . Yet the days pass, Keith, the years pass, and nothing happens. I await redemption. The touch of some god's fingers against mine — ah, I would accept a minor deity, like Keith Lurie! — yet

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the transformation doesn't come. Should I wait for you in the darkened hall of your building, on my knees? A devoté, submissive lover, on my knees?

I will make the first move. Don't doubt me. My body tingles and stiffens at the thought.

Last night I wandered through the alley behind your building, completely content. Unseen. Armed only with a flashlight, so that I could look into the overflowing garbage bins in the hope — I have no false pride, Keith!— of discovering something that might have belonged to you. Papers, debris, garbage that did not really smell unpleasant; yet I found nothing that was yours, uniquely yours.

Will you help me?

Yours,
R. Brightmore

R.B. desires meeting with K.L. Much to be explained & enjoyed.
— The Village Voice

14 November

Dear Keith:

Enclosed is a little ad I ran the other day — probably you missed it.

Have I described myself yet? Eyes dark brown, lustrous. A boy's eyes, even at my age (you'll have to guess at the age — just add a few dour years to your own). Not a young woman, no. Not young. Not a woman. Anything else you care to know?

Run and I will pursue you. I know all about you: the black holes of the universe drag everything into them, their gravity is so great, so deathly, everything is sucked into them and dies. Is absorbed. You are inside me, in my head. You will find it comfortable there so long as you don't resist. After all you are my possession, *mine*. You belong to all who know your music and read about you but especially to me because I have claimed you; my love makes me omnipotent.

. . . You looked right at me the other day, on the street. I half–think you recognized me. I was the man in the dull-brown coat, hatless, with the pale forehead, the eyes cringing and begging behind my glasses. Since your marriage ended a few months ago you must

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notice more people around you, people like me. Or was I the man in the blue suit who stepped aside so that you could go into a midtown restaurant? He shot you a quick, keen, hot smile which you pretended not to see. You were with a woman, a negligible creature, bony-faced and laughing too shrilly. . . . Or was I the figure lean as a boy, in black trousers and a black turtleneck sweater, with my hair combed down onto my forehead in a fan-like bang, following you slowly, weightlessly, along the street, following you into that drugstore on 59th Street, waiting for you to make your purchase (a carton of cigarettes)? I happen to know that your oldest brother, Carl, died at the age of forty-one from lung cancer, yet you can't seem to stop smoking. You are addicted, are you? Perhaps you wish for death? Smoking = Death.

I have never smoked. It's a disgusting, weak habit.

I surround you, I possess you. You have never possessed yourself the way I possess you. How can you escape? Do you think you can knock someone like me aside, if you found me kneeling mutely in your corridor? How? You need me to worship you, my love is more pure than any you have known, I will lift my voice in hosannas: *Genius! Beloved!* When you die I will kneel beside your grave, or one like it. When you're dying I will hang around the hospital, overhearing the whispered conversations of your friends — if you have any friends left by then — sniffing the odor of your suffering. How I will cherish it — *your suffering.* Can you guess? I will imagine your death before you do; I will live it for you, shuddering at it, alive with the delicious sensation of it, Keith Lurie's death — his death imagined and cherished *before it even takes place.* And then afterward — ah, yes, many times! — many times afterward, indeed! Can you guess what ecstasy this is, the healthy wholesome worship of a great man, by a devoted believer? Can you guess?

I have resisted vulgarity. Consciously. I have resisted what is called The Obscene. But to give a name to myself, I must be reckless and risk losing you — or gaining you? (And after all, Keith Lurie, you aren't very important and you know it: die tomorrow and nobody will miss you, a "minor American composer with promise" in small headlines in *The New York Times*! You know this!) I will define myself: I am your disciple, your single believer, your *fan.*

We are united. A point of flaming rushing light, a "star" (and

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what an obscene word that is!) and his mate, a black hole, oh a very articulate and courteous black hole, but black nevertheless, a *hole* nevertheless, a speaking breathing chewing worshipping hole nevertheless . . . a fan. Your death won't delight you, but it will delight me because it will be *your* death. I will be waiting. And I will remember. Can you guess how very specialized fans are, how very loyal? How much more deep a hole can be, more permanent and dependable than any star?

Other people will forget you — your wife and children, certainly — but your fans will remember you, because they have nothing else to do.

I will live and relive your life, your death agony, and your death. So sweet. Have faith in me. Of your fans (and you probably haven't many, being minor; you can't be choosy) I will remember you best, so have faith. And give a sign. In fact, for your own good give a sign. I will confess that at this point in my life *I need you as much as you need me,* so for your own good give me a sign: call me at 945-0095, any day after 5:30.

Faithfully,
R. Brightmore

David Zane Mairowitz

THE GRACE

Born a boy, she would have been Franklin Delano Roosevelt Munch. Instead she was named to commemorate her own illegal entry through popular evidence of gloomy weather, a song of mournful lovers, she, Perfidia, the woman-child, disgrace and burden to a history of doctors and certified public accountants. Her opening leap into being had rent a significant hole in Mother Munch, awaiting a masculine sonata at the first scream. She had been cheated of her seasons and her purpose. And when, with the first dive for the breast, the child drank down her feast and kept it down, without a moment's falter at the brink of catastrophe, with a giggle of containment and

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unconcern, the perfidy was complete. Mother Munch was left in the lurch.

Perfidia always held fast to her vision of the 1940s, a time when she was talked out of her childhood and subtly prepared for that dark night of the womb in which she must linger till the menopause. It was a time of commitment and War, clearing the table momentarily of a previously dispassionate existence. And somewhere after the War (her Mother warned) she would bleed from the loins, to do penance for being born a girl. The War had taken all the boys away (including Father Munch, who returned quickly with shards of exploded metal in his thigh) and the women were barren and empty for a time. "The horror of a world without men," cried Mother Munch, in such a manner as to leave no question but that Perfidia was guilty of it.

And, after the War, Father Munch would have no sons what with his mangled thigh, and the woman-child was stretched to the borders of her life. There at the edge she was to accept responsibility for this final outrage against history and drift into a melancholia which would pursue her through all the journeys back to her center. At age nine she lost her innocence to a migraine headache which served her up spent to her impending womanhood. This pain hung on her eyes like fishweights, pressing their soft jelly in an illicit caress.

And yet, it was not to be spoken of. Too much suffering had already spread from the contagion of her existence. There was Father Munch, taking her for long walks in the woods, limping his postwar limp, hardly speaking aloud, muttering to himself and wiping the occasional tear. The mine blast had lifted him skyward, and now he thought he floated over the 1940s in a slow leak, soon to spread-eagle thud on the infected marshes of his life.

Still, something remained with her of these desperate afternoons, some vague hint of sentiment in the aftermath of the War. It was as if coherence was a fact, not a luxury, the men were home, babies were appearing on the landscape and the mediocrity of the coming decade had not yet cast its tentacles.

Perfidia dreamed of the day she would have long legs and wear broad-shouldered gowns.

A memory of razors clings in the wedges where her eyebrows have been removed. "Prince Kropotkin" had shaved them himself,

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despising, as he did, the hair on women's bodies. She needed grooming, an overhaul. She had let herself run down. He would change all that. With his razor he would carve out the New Woman. His legs had wrapped round her head, holding her fast, while he lathered her brows, softened them with his fingers and finally danced over them with several turns of his wrist. She bled, but never screamed. She had summoned this pain and devoured it at the roots.

After which he commanded she lose weight and she starved for weeks to no avail.

His name was Zimmerman, but these were clandestine desperate days. He had pinned her beneath him like a butterfly, his meat hands wrapped round her wrists, ankles chaining legs. And boxed under glass she could look up through the surface at his man's face, thick and bearded, and wonder, in the paste of her dilemma, how she had managed to will it. In the night he would come and go, this, her first lover, pressing at her corners with his massive demands, leaving her stretched and disfigured to the secret mirrors inside her.

Five years on, his steel has welded to the iron terror of her migraine, a permanent fixture in her eyebrows. The hair has never grown back and she is marked as a fifteenth-century concubine. The old concentrate of blood leaves her puffed and swollen and, in her newer mirrors, she sees the corpse of her worn pride and bends in the accepting.

"Now we start with a steel pipe, maybe four inches in diameter and eight inches long and we cap it at one end. We fill it three–quarters full with ammonium nitrate, then equal layers of potassium chlorate and confectionery sugar on top of that."

His hand runs under her blouse and massages her nipples as he talks. She takes in five years of him in one breath, his hand has changed, roughed over with gunpowder. She feels the sting of his assassinations in his triggerfinger. He is roving in the zone now and encounters the switchblade knife strapped to her belly. He intuits five years in that touch. He is amused. In her depths she contemplates drawing the blade across his eyes. Yet she hasn't the simple words to stop his fingers which have now found her out. She is stretched, they note, widened beyond contempt.

"You aren't listening," he says.

"I am."

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"You were daydreaming."

"No."

"It's always the same, isn't it? You want to perform, to open the floodgates, move out of your quicksand. But when it comes to the crunch, you haven't got one minute's concentration."

"I'm ready."

"If it were up to me, this wouldn't be assigned to you."

"Why?"

"You haven't got the fluidity. Emergency washes over you like a sandstorm . . . You cap the open end with a primer made with a high powered rifle bullet, .30-06 preferably, with as small a lead slug as possible. Now we cut off the slug right here where it joins the shell casing. Then drill a hole in the pipe cap the exact size of the bullet, then seat the bullet in the hole, leaving about one-third of the bullet primer sticking out. Now we come to the fuse . . . You can't fake this one, babe. Why they've assigned you such an important event I don't know. Maybe they think you can handle it 'cause you don't know the fear of the game yet. But it's foolproof if you can muster the attention, the pride. Everything will be prepared for you. It can only fail if you do. Understand?"

"No."

"Figure it out. You think you can handle this?"

"I said I was ready."

"Ready for what? Ready to understand, ready to go in, willing to do this for us? The others seem to have confidence in you. I don't think you'll ever make it."

"Why not?"

"Because you're blocked. Between one end of this maneuver and the other is an incredible momentum."

"And so?"

"Your rhythm's all wrong."

The ghosts are howling in the wind of her headache. He gunned, slammed the cycle into gear and they were off along the furious cliffs. Against the grain of the wind her wispy masses of hair danced out over the canyon, wrenched from her temples and pulled violently along her scalp. Down below she saw a multiplicity of possible deaths, brains shattered about the perimeter in hairpin spins of the bike. Her own corpse strewn about the valley in a thousand breakings. They

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were the pieces of her and each was like soft fur caressing the whole of her as she stampeded the dustbowl. Every joint ached in her coming-alive and she was inspired to bend her weight toward the brink in order to feel the deathglide through unfriendly space, a collapsing in air, the acceptance of her fall, the split-second preening for the act of impact. And the prepared strength in the certainty she would never scream.

He was content to murder frogs with his pistol. The brook lay stretched below a dark cliff and he casually fired at frantic amphibians. When he was bored, he fired first to the side of the frog, hoping to nail it in mid-leap with a second shot. Then he told her to take off her clothes which she did without protest. Did she have protection? She didn't understand. He had a rubber, he said, but didn't feel like using it. What did she think of that? She didn't think anything. Keep your pants on. It was more fun that way anyway. The sun was melting her brain and, like paste, she glided wherever his fingers spread her. And soon he was battering at her through her underwear and she lay thoroughly clutched and unmoving. She could feel the soft cloth tickling her inside and quickly his moisture gathering in her. More than that she could not answer for. Where's the blood, he demanded. She had nothing to give him, not even this desperate gesture to nature. He cleaned himself in her hair and she was forced to wash it in the brook so that on the return up the canyon it no longer sailed behind her like a mare's tail, but cracked wet and heavy on her back like whips.

"You need some mending tape about three-eighths of an inch wide. Now you dissolve equal amounts of potassium chlorate and sugar in boiling water. The solution must be strong but not saturated. Soak the tape in the solution and wrap it round the cartridge base, making sure to get as many turns of the fuse as you can. When it dries your fuse will burn at about two minutes per foot."

His hand is now on her head and his fingers are laughing over the new-shorn fuzz of it. Crudely shaved at the neck, she will need a wig for her performance.

"You will need some straight clothes."

"I haven't any money."

"That's your problem. You'll need hair and makeup too. See

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to it . . . Finally, you must shape the charge to direct most of the explosive force in one direction. Grind away the center of the first pipe cap and place this end against your target. Now, what are you going to do with it?"

"Blow the . . ."

"Wrong already. This bomb I've described to you is crude. You will have to learn to construct one in an emergency, in case something goes wrong with the more sophisticated explosive you are given. You need to gear for an emergency, Perfidia. Everything depends on it."

He inspects her teeth, forcing his nails into her gums till they bleed. Five years of murdering statesmen and executives, police officers and informers probe in her mouth. She gags. He checks her ears, still caked with wax, finds those areas of her body he knows will be coated with filth. She will have to preen, but now, for a moment, she challenges his thrust. He can fuck himself. Nonetheless, she is told, she will preen for the Movement, for her task she will wash, diet, bend and buckle. Finally, she will leave her door ajar this night.

In the night she is visited by her migraine, and it enters her via the ports of her eyeballs. This is her "troll-lover" who has latched himself onto her face, probing the secret reaches of her nostrils, her mouth, her eyes and ears. He has kept the fine hours of her life and caused her unceasing grief. Look now as he carries her to the multiple Academies of her youth, houses of desperate worship where purpose and achievement are sanctified. It is to these concentration camps that Mother Munch forces her, the proving grounds of her fantasies of the future. Yet Perfidia is strangely at home here what with the festering values of a century fixed and on permanent display, a museum-mirror to her casual self-eradication. Here she learns the root and seed mythologies, the preponderances of the family, the dominion of the State. Here she is made to understand that life is an accumulation of its pressures ("the competition's fierce, babe") and that Man is in a perpetual state of war with Nature, thereby rendering a life of achievement a full-scale battle. We must earn our place, she discovers. We must grow in the process, we must gather the distressing threads of social history and carry them into a future of con-

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crete accomplishment. Still, she feels more like a witness giving evidence to her days.

She also learns that woman is now emancipated and that she must take her place alongside man in the creation of diplomatic channels to the Natural State. She must employ the tools of femininity to summon up pathways to power which end of necessity at a better world. All this she must do in the understanding that the elements of her search and vision will certainly be hostile to her, that she must establish her values and hold them to her bosom, that force and determination are gestures of survival in the landscape of stress.

Yet she is pinned to the wall by migraine. The years wash over her in waves of pain and she walks the tombs of the Academies in simulated catatonia. Her troll-lover is antisocial, this she knows. She stands in gloomy courtyards in moments when he has taken hold of her eyes and casually dreams the stones to dust. He has loaned her the will to destroy all this and she carries her secret to the peripheries of knowledge — and escapes. Mother Munch will not hear of it and conjures up her riot squads. They trace Perfidia to the borders but she has disappeared inside herself, dropped to the depths of her well with her troll-lover who presses her eyeballs to a blindness in the darkness. Mother Munch goes into mourning for her own life, for the perpetuation of her image.

Prince Kropotkin has pushed open her door. She has lain between sleep and torment all night. She did not expect him, yet she has left the door ajar. She did not want him, yet she has left the door ajar. The pain leaps about her face like light.

Her eyes begin to focus in the light now violently switched on. She sees a second man, vague. He has escaped the armies to the East and joined the Movement. He has contacts in military munitions warehouses. A history of such Comrades tells her she must be his whore. She rushes toward sleep. The sheet is pulled back, and she is exposed sweating and unkempt. Kropotkin indicates where he has shaved her brows, then proceeds to massage her body. He bridges five years. She sweats, cannot summon, yet again, the language to distract him. He offers her with a simple gesture of moving away. In her half-sleep she blocks comprehension of it.

Kropotkin stands at the window, looking for his police-shadow,

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speaking of the Movement. Like the soldier, he has learned to harness his aggression and employ it to purpose. He has lived the thrill of random violence and run it aground. He has now read the texts and understood. The Comrade has mounted Perfidia and is in her instantly, before she wakes. She is his first woman since the War and he is spent before her body can even yield to its pleasure. Now she is awake and crying in this, and she is made aware of a black body spinning from her. In his controlled fury, Kropotkin reminds her she has never understood. Then too, she is weak and demoralized. He will take his turn, but only in disgust. She jumps from the bed and flicks open her knife. The soldier immediately disarms her, then demonstrates how to avoid being disarmed. Kropotkin claims she has learned nothing about self-defense and must join his lectures in karate and weaponry at the Women's Brigade. Again he tells her she will fail in her mission. She hasn't the scope, the range, the sense of humor. They leave her to her migraine. She weeps. She closes, locks the door in anger and contempt. Somewhere in the night, a night of narcosis, she awakes, a sleepwalker to her mythology of regret, and leaves the door ajar once again.

"Your pistol is your lover, ladies. Wear him close to you at all times like a protector. If you forget that for one minute, you may find yourself shot down defenseless."

The women resent his patronizing, but his expertise is essential. He has run these guns himself, armed and taught the entire Brigade. Then too, he has instructed them in the practice of yoga and isometric exercises, military calisthenics and jiujitsu. Kropotkin's proficiency and commitment are legendary in the Movement. His practical fame has spread like a contagion among the women who have known his prying palms. Each has had the hatred of him and yet he holds an apocalyptic future over them all with his military gifts. Each has dreamed a secret ice pick in his brain, but still spreads before him now in callisthenic humiliation, underarms pouring sweat to his signals.

Like a sack he dumped her on the porch of Mother Munch's and kicked her belly again and again, craving one instant of protest, one murmur of repudiation to wash him clean. But she continued to deny it and the torture bent and crippled him. He knew it wasn't

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pride for she had none, surely. He banged her head on the wooden porch till she lost consciousness and he threw her in a hedge.

When Mother Munch discovered her there, she would not talk. She was tranquilized, put to bed and, in the night, he broke in where she slept and climbed on her, smacking against her insides like a steam hammer. Afterwards, he injected some morphine and cried on her hair, wiping his eyes and nose in it. He told her of his electrotherapy, designed to squash his fury, but it had come to nothing. All his life he fought for the mastery of his body. His control had failed, his will had gone rotten, he was afraid of killing her. She didn't care. Why didn't she fight him? Did she love him? She didn't know. He would teach her to stand up to him. He would teach her pride. What did she think? Nothing.

In the light, Mother Munch discovered him in Perfidia's bed and threatened him with Authority. It was the last the two women had seen of one another and the elder, some years a widow, found her solace in the charting of astrological bodies in their pilgrimage across the arcs and chains of the heavens. This way she could no longer proclaim, only guess. In this new gift, she uncovered the safety of the Moment, a clear picture rising before her in the day, and waived her rights at last to the frantic future.

Perfidia cracks under the strain of this morning-after and her body's stress. Kropotkin makes an example of her before the others, demonstrating how she has been assigned the most momentous task of all and hasn't one-half its necessary resources. She sits in a frothing heap as he stands over her, lecturing the Brigade on their habits. They are all fat and beneath the contempt of the Movement. From this day, they are to consume twice the normal protein or give up the struggle. Carbohydrates are to be cut to a minimum and the working day is to be divided into clear thirds, bodily upkeep, weapons practice and careful reading of the classic texts. Intercourse, also, must be kept to a minimum, as it will drain the vital energy banks. At the same time, sexual frustration is to be avoided as it makes for muscular imbalance. Narcotics are out of the question, as well as alcohol. He will only lend his service and his proficiency to a disciplined Movement. He then suggests a meeting to strip Perfidia of her role and replace her with a more capable Comrade. She turns on him like a scorpion. His teeth are waiting for her rebuttal. They

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glisten damply and persecute her in their bite. Another sister protests on her behalf. The choice has been made. He is to take no part in the selective process, but restrict himself to training. There is to be no vying for power or intercommunal combat. To replace her would mean a severing of respect and commitment. The sisters assent. He bares his teeth once more. Perfidia attempts to whitewash any intentions written on her face. She stands to him, but her belly contracts in the signal that her period has begun. He can see this and bends to her agony, examining her fingernails.

"It is lucky for you. Five days from now you must perform and will have stopped bleeding. In that time you will also stop using tobacco or picking the skin from behind your nails. You will also go into solitary confinement in three day's time, take all your instruction and exercise alone and you will be known now, for better or worse, as Rosa Luxemburg."

The broad shoulders of the forties contracted, then flamed into the conical breasts of the fifties. Perfidia never got her gown and silently went into mourning for it. Her decade had run down and given way to whitewashed times. A mediocre moan hung on the wind, a tuneless echo, low and dishonest. One day during these terrible times she began to bleed from the loins and, at last, the prophecy had come true. She had brought this upon herself and nothing would change it. She crept through the halls of the 1950s, a hungry voiceless spirit. Toothless men embraced her in the streets and she carried their whiskey-breaths to her terror-caves. They fumbled in her underwear in dark parks and their fingers clung to her regions long after, in her solitude. And, in an era of perpetual accusation, Perfidia said nothing.

Father Munch spent these days before the smiling image of a bald man who had led him to battle, and adopted the fear of the moment. He felt accused. The fingers on the screen pointed at him, a broken soldier, as the war penetrated the bowels of the Eastern jungles. Then, as quickly, he willed a cancer in his brain and waited for the times to take him. His demise was silently laid at Perfidia's doorstep and, for retribution, she conceived a skinful of ugly protrusions. This was intolerable to Mother Munch who, having long since given up the notion of a future for herself, began to groom the

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daughter for an inevitable merger. Four days a week under the sunlamp, a dozen creams and ointments, but Perfidia's stubborn persona failed to yield up its facial fruits. Then brushed and combed, vaginally deodorized, caked with paint, small breasts uplifted in tight brassieres, revealing pastel sweaters, nightly pin curls, the package was as complete as it might ever be. Still, the demons of Perfidia resisted and an ungainly, plump and marked specimen emerged from Mother Munch's machine. It was further evidence to the crimes of existence she had perpetrated from the starting gun.

A sort of reverie takes the old woman as she watches over the chainlock entrance. It is a face she knows, evidence of an old pox, features unwashed, unkept. From out of some dim conjunction of planets a face has presented itself in the four inches of chainlock evidence-space and breeds in her a sudden paralysis of memory. Truly enough, the stars have warned her of the apocalyptic nature of the day, heralding, above all, "illegal entries." Against the promise of "uninvited guests, perhaps bill collectors or insurance salesmen, domineering and resolute," she has chainlocked the entrance to her sanctuary. "Sagittarius beware," are the first words to greet her over morning tea, "night time is closing in upon you even in the crisp light of day. Today your home is your castle and it is sacrosanct. Beware of a dark man who enters during the peak hours of sunlight. Be he secret lover or scourge, your money is unsafe, even rolled inside your hair curlers, even stashed in your deepfreeze."

Yet it is raining and bleak and the face belongs to a woman.

"Why don't you let me in?"

"None today, thank you."

The old woman cannot quite close the door. Something in the face is carving out a niche in the rage of her consciousness. The dim stranger perhaps has appeared.

"I'm leaving."

She undoes the chain.

Seven years of Perfidia slip through in a flash. Tea is served. Silence is manifest. The large house glares empty and unused at her. Only this sitting room, with its amateur maps of the heavens and zodiacal symbols embroidered on doilies and tablecloths, continues to perform in the house's new aura. The face she stares at is aged and painted, the hair sprayed to a hard fiber and softly blue. Now the

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cracked orange lips have asked her birthsign and a stunned Taurus responds. The breadknife-shaved pencil stub proceeds to mark out its triangles on a large disk. Her exact birthdate is gathered from her and the intersecting vertices of several triangles are measured in their distances from a central thumbprint the Taurean is forced to make on the paper. The day, apparently, has dawned bright for her. The rain bisects the curve of her joy at about noon. She will be careless today, she will reveal her secrets to a false spirit who will misuse them. Don't go out of doors. Don't give anything away. Reveal nothing. Drink hot liquids by the pint.

"I need to borrow some of your clothes."

The old woman has stopped abruptly. Her one good eye now closes in on the figure of a young girl seated before her.

"Do you ever wash?"

"Mother . . ."

"My clothes? What for?"

"I'm going to an affair."

"A formal affair?"

"I haven't any clothes."

Mother Munch stands before her French windows and accuses the rain. Outside, somewhere, the plants are drowning and no one will lend a helping hand. She has written to the Authorities, complaining of the character of modern life, but they are too busy to respond. All about her the trees are leaping, lifting their skirts to the stars, and there is no one to care. These nights she hears explosions in the vicinity and no one will tell her their meaning or the extent of the damage. Then too, the night has come crawling in sooner, of late, all to persecute her and keep her prisoner in the new decade. Gunfire awakens her at night and even the War brought no sounds of this kind. And who are the men that will protect the women from assault in the dim gutters? And now the thieves have come in on the wind and steal the very nails from her fitted carpets. The Sun has gone down already, only a noontime for her, and will it ever rise up to meet her again? She must inquire of the Chief of Police.

"Get out."

"I only want one suit of clothes. I'll never bother you again."

"Nothing from me. You'll steal nothing from me. I know. It's going round. It's in the neighborhood."

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The rash begins to crawl over Perfidia's legs and her troll-lover thumps his rubber tail in her eyes. She goes to a cupboard, selects a brown suit at random, a lace hat with glass fruit on top, a pair of stockings. She rolls them together against the rain.

"Perfidia!"

The voice tugs at her sleeve in the doorway. Mother Munch has unearthed a breadknife and holds it, handle first, toward the vanishing figure.

"Take everything. Anything you want. Only, please, cut my throat. Cut my throat."

The young girl disappears in the rain and the old woman must report a theft. It is in the course of things to do so.

In her basement room, Perfidia has put on the stolen garments and glares at an image of her Mother in the mirror. She cups the protruding shoulder of the jacket, throwing her arm across her mouth. She sucks in at the wrist, wonders at the tight hips and long skirt. Kropotkin will find it out of date and detectable. She must rip out the shoulders, shorten the skirt, cut the fruit from the moth-eaten hat. Before doing this, she sees, for the last time, in her widest eye, the wearing of this garment for Father Munch, returning from his wounds, all through that night, never removed.

Her confinement is celebrated this night by the entire Brigade. She is taken to some dark hovel where she will spend the two nights before her act. She will see or communicate with no one, and only the special emissary of the Brigade will bring her instructions at the final hour. She will be given time only to carry out her objective, not to brood on it. This isolation is the rotten fruit of past miscalculations. There have been too many leaks, too many rents in the fabric of Absolute Security.

She is given a ration of brown rice and water. During the preparatory hours she will be fed excessive doses of sugar to mobilize her force. She is made to wear her Mother's clothes until they are worn naturally. On the final day, her emissary will help her to prepare her face and hair, iron her clothing and lead her to a place where she will collect her explosive device. She is made to consume the classic texts which form the background to her act. She must understand the historical perspective and morality of her intentions. She

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knows her thrust will be against an institution of oppression and therefore will have no need to question the specific shape of her charge at its moment of illumination.

The 1960s had come upon her in a rush, as had Zimmerman. She had given this decade its peculiar shape through a violent eradication of the previous one. If they had been chained to the mediocrity and hyperboredom of the times, the moment now cried out for detonation. He explained all this to her as he became exposed to the political messages which marked the air like Morse Code. Flashing assassinations and gliding chain-reactive explosions. Electricity and its shocks, an overwhelming tactility and percussion for a world up a blind alley.

But she thought he was all these things already. The specification of it in words cheated him of a certain dynamic to which she had spread her wings. To gather the shape of his anger was to lose its ferocity. He wandered in a perpetual planning stage of cause and effect, stepping out of its protective skin, now and again, to shatter the brains of public men. And to do this was to leave her in the wake of his new awareness. She had no place in it when docility and silence were her measure.

She had anticipated his move to leave her behind and she drew first fire by walking backward out of his aura. She tossed a hood of silence over him and shrouded his body in the limp cloth of her own. She fell away softly and, in his pride, he imagined he was leaving her. It was necessary for him to be alone and clear in his acts. She said nothing. She gave him nothing but her submission, never a gesture in the holocaust of personality disruption. No barriers, no reefs to crash on, only the calm waters of Nothing to glide. He promised that every time he murdered, it would be her in his eyes. This proved true and soon the dim politics of it eroded him.

And now in her dungeon she sees before her the landscape of the decade as he absconds. The months of catatonia, hovering in hovels, the project of rising to regret again through the taking of a hundred arbitrary lovers. The rampant sexuality of her despair, the force feeding, the dangerous cliffs over which her body dangles. And, above all, the casual abuse of this body, the willing leap to migraine in its inevitability, the mindless erosion of her contours through skin-picking and excess weight, the tired bending of limbs to sexual assault

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and acceptance of a thousand unknown fluids in her receptacle. This is a virtual 1960s of effects for her, the rapid alternation of psychic energies and exhaustions. Her rhythm is vague. She feels a flush of freedom and growth, running headlong in pursuit. She gathers up territories of achievement and claims them as part of a new personal myth. She drifts off from the double-edged razor of Zimmerman and Mother Munch. She uncovers the roots of her own industry.

And then she fails, in alternation. She struggles with belief as she sees around her the sputterings of the human mechanism depleting its own resources. Everywhere the day has run down. She collects these ruins and projects them on a screen before her. She witnesses a disappearance of quality and accepts responsibility for it. She trundles up the faded rags of her breed and vows resurrection. Somewhere in this loss of Zimmerman she gains his fists. On the fifteenth anniversary of her migraine she mounts the blood to her brain and enters the port of destruction. She has accepted the dim purpose of her era, its remaking. She leaps.

However, her tomb now mirrors her disaffection with her thrust. The vitality of commitment is already extinguished and she harbors only the potential mischief of her act. Yet she must struggle with her own nature in its apathy, for Kropotkin has surely found her out with his first look.

The room is cold and dark and she has begun to feel a tickling in her loins. She searches with a candle and finds she is discharging a green substance.

He has entered as she knew he would. If it were known, he would be shot. What gives him the security of her silence, even now, she muses. He sits opposite her. She cannot see his face. It occurs to her in such light she may show him her defiance. If it can be absorbed, without him being witness to it, she can follow it through. She realizes, in the silence, that she has always awaited his instigation. He must speak first.

"You're sapping my attention, Perfidia, haunting my sleep again. I warn you, keep off me."

In his voice she hears a familiar choking. How easy to remember him without seeing his changeable eyes. She hears, out of another era, the soft collapse of his hair on her belly and remembers the signals of fear. Leather crackles as he shifts in his chair and she smells

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a ghost clinging in the musky room. Something in him has died and now haunts the moment, a moment she has provoked. She calculates the beginning of his confession and interprets it as an impending assault upon her sex. She understands she has brought this about through her silence.

"It was all clear till you started roaming in my nightmares again."

He has not moved and she remains calm, but with a cautious thumb planted at her waist, at the edge of her blade. Her tickling is now acute and she equates it with a certain air of poison he has brought into the room. She fails to trace the shape of his protest. Its random aggression inflames her and she feels now she has in fact lived clear of him. There is a new deafness to mock the infections he pours in her ear. One moment of direct contagion helps her to circumnavigate five long years of crawling out of his shade. There is a delicious humming in her head.

"Last night I dreamed I carved my initials in your brain, but you refused to decode the message. You've jumped in where you aren't wanted, Perfidia. The other day I jammed my fingers into you and found you'd been done over while I was away. Don't think I'll let you rest with all this, babe. Every time you trip up in the street, I'll be there to lean on you. Every time you crack, I'll come running with my crowbar to finish the job."

He has gotten up now and her disappointment is immense. She has lived a solid moment without the freight of his body looming over her, has discovered in his voice a loss of hope, in his breathing, the scarred remains of his passion. He will spoil this by ambling towards her, pretending to engage her, all the while stalking and trembling. His hand, a weight on the darkness, hovers in sexual dilemma, midair, a hand which has thrown the circuits of Power into chaos, drawn the riot squads up from their retreats — this hand now descends like a carpet on air. She has come up to meet him, despite the blackness, drawing her switchblade between his thumb and forefinger, the blood spattering her shaven head. She doubles back in swift retreat, thinking he will surely kill her now, her knife at the ready. But he only backs off and waits.

"Why don't you try and finish it. You've done my trigger finger. I can't even reach for the pistol. You'd better do it, Perfidia. One cut means nothing. You know what happens next."

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She leans to the stone wall to get her breath. The pain in her loins has brought her to the edge of fire. He is right. She will not be able to kill because she is asleep. This pounding fact has opened a chasm before her and she is falling in it. Against her will, the tears have burst from her. She has never known such pain, even at the worst of her bleedings. His contempt is redoubled as he conceives she has collapsed to her knees in cowardice. Again she fails him, his bride of Frankenstein, gone the female route to passivity.

The pain has swollen to a knot, but she grips her knife in anticipation. Kropotkin feels a nerve of deep embarrassment tingle up his back and then subside. He wishes his feelings at this moment were something more powerful, but he has dried to the combat. He recalls a time, perhaps in another life, when he had threatened to kill her and, in self-defense, she took him in her mouth. He remembers waves of retribution and resentment giving way to the desperate ecstasy of his blast and how, in that rush, he had accepted his own instinct to murder. What had torn and racked his youth and sleep, a throbbing resentment of his life, now shattered in a thrill. And it was Perfidia's pitiful secondhand humanity which had yielded up his secret. She knew every corner of him and the emptiness of her presence in his shade became a crisis for him.

And now the despair returns as he witnesses the further evidence of her mutilation. He cannot retract a shred of it. Despite her fury, he disarms her and pins her fast. He sees he has failed to ravage an already shopworn article and he can never again imagine his body holding dominion over this corpse. Up close, he sees that she sees his eyes leaping at her, but that the suffering there fails to ignite her. It is, for him, because she has learned nothing. He wants to leave a kiss here, but this is not the face for it.

The cold military eyes of the doctor force her to a cruel attention here in the halls of the clinic where she has staggered in torment. He studies the results of the tests in which she has been scraped, smeared, probed, watered. She begs for a sedative, he tells her she must wait. She is near fainting now and wonders at her task, just over twenty-four hours ahead. She must manage to return before her emissary arrives, to avoid suspicion and not put the project in jeopardy.

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"You have been with a soldier."

This is more of a statement than a question and it takes her unawares. The face that confronts her expresses nothing; it is ruled, pragmatic, has watched a decade of unceasing infection in the demise of the contemporary urinary tract.

"No."

"Come come now. We're not here to play games. I'm trying to help you, Miss Luxemburg."

"I haven't."

"You must have been."

"Why?"

"Because you have been passed a strain of gonococcus which derives from Southeast Asia and is generally transmitted by soldiers returning from the front. If you haven't been with a soldier, then this is a chain reaction begun by one, and you'll be helping to spread an epidemic unless you cooperate."

"I'm sure it isn't true."

"The rotten thing is that it only acts as mild gonorrhea in the male, and most of the men treat it lightly. But I'm afraid its effect on the vaginal tract can be severe. The pain you are now experiencing may well be the beginning of pelvic inflammatory disease, an erosive process in the cervix, uterus, Fallopian tubes and ovaries."

Through the pain, the calculated measure of his voice has penetrated some deep fear and she finds herself listening, not through her normal haze, but rather through a newly-opened window. She wonders if there is a plot to divert her from her mission, but she knows she has come of her own free will.

"I must warn you of the extreme gravity of this bacteria if it spreads. You would be wise to avoid intercourse until you are cleared (if that's not asking too much), no alcohol or spices and drink lots of liquids. After your stay, you must report to us every forty-eight hours."

"My 'stay'?"

"You'll have to stay with us till tomorrow morning. There is a government regulation on this."

Perfidia has gone white and cold. She regrets her weakness. Instead of this, she might have stolen her mother's tranquillizers and

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quickly returned to her sanctuary. She could have borne this pain for two days.

"I'm afraid I can't stay. You see . . ."

"You must, Miss Luxemburg. We have strict orders. We have lovely gardens for you to wander in, you can relax, you won't be kept in a bed. We'll notify your family for you."

"No. Don't."

"All right then, we'll keep it confidential."

She reckons all is not lost. If she can leave in the morning, it will give her several hours before the arrival of her emissary. It may not be noticed at all.

She is given further tests, bloodlettings and injections. For her pain there is morphine, an institutional gown to wrap her in and the door leading to the sprawling lawns of the clinic where she must relax. She walks about in nervous anticipation, and the skin of her fingers is the worse for it. More than anything else, her defiance of Kropotkin is at stake. This now overrides any shred of political commitment as her explosive striking force. It is to shatter his Look in her blast that she lives for her moment of detonation. She gathers the hatred of him, in her catastrophe of pain, and calculates bringing him up on charges, before the Brigade, of entering her confinement and of attempting to block the mission through acts of psychic provocation.

She doesn't quite remember how she has sunk to the grass, can't recall a sudden short circuit. The current stopped and she fell through gravitational space in desperate free fall, the forces of her delirium tugged her windward and the echo of her thud informed a distracted earth of her affliction.

Now the Sun relates a spectacle in the midst of which she is released from her coma. She is aware first of a sense of space, vast and green, and she is shaken from the traps of her confinement. Despite the sterility of the grounds, she finds a benevolence here in the languid shrubbery of the afternoon. Slowly her body drifts out of its morphine shell and the pains begin to mount again; yet, she is calm. Somewhere, somehow, she feels that a crisis has passed or is just passing. It is the delicious twilight leave-taking of morphine. Her hand reaches beneath her gown and returns to her a pale green. Between her legs a ravaged city is undergoing a postwar experience. She

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replaces her fingers and drives them slowly upward, through the walls of the fortress, into the thick of its devastation. There is no life any more, only an aftermath, only the taint of plague everywhere. A soldier. She recalls no soldiers. And yet how many invading armies have rampaged in these town walls, taken into the sanctuary indiscriminately? Her recollection is poor. But now the streets are flowing in a sewage of green mucus, left by some faceless minister of infection. And, too, the hallowed halls at her depths are charred and scourged, the insides of her humanity shredded and running green. This is a woman's disaster, she muses, and, in some curious woman's despair and anguish, she has willed it.

Perfidia sits up as best she can and the blood rushes into her belly, out of her brain, the empty chasm where her troll-lover waits to take his place. She experiences the failure of her body. It has dredged up its wastes and stored them in her awkward corners, forcing her to walk or stand in perpetual muscular discomfort and confusion. Before her she conjures up her specter of achievement, of action in the provocative mirrors of the world. She knows now, in a brief moment of suspended clarity lighting up the broken hours of her days, that she lacks the grace she needs to set these fires under her.

All this is a clamor in her ears. A tide of years is surging in her threatening a flood of regret over the dam she has built against herself. She must collect and face the time.

But in this composure-seeking a public man has approached and stands over her. He smiles casually, but she has been trained to recognize a certain disciplinary eye. He would like a few words with her and, in his labored politeness, he has carelessly identified himself with strategies of law. He explains again the routine of detaining patients suffering from this ailment. Perfidia further wakes to a situation of extreme alarm and she regrets she cannot muster the control to deal with this sudden preponderance of authority. Could she please identify the soldier she has been with? She again denies the existence of such a man. Has she, he begs her pardon, slept with anyone of late who has slept with someone who has slept, might have slept, with a soldier? She has slept with no one. Nonetheless, he reminds her, she has contracted, as he calls it, "a social disease." It must have come from somewhere. Women can pick up such infections without intercourse, she informs him. Not this one, she is told. To be perfectly

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honest, says the policeman or whatever he may be in his crisp black suit, all servicemen returning from "that part of the world" are subjected to strict urinalysis and none is released until "clear." She misses the implication. It's quite simple, he explains, the man who has left her in this dilemma has not been through the normal medical channels, which is highly irregular, illegal and impossible except in cases of absence without official leave. Perfidia is lost in this, implicated, as she is, in one of her own nightmares, and the paranoia is acute. She knows nothing, she pleads. Remember, he warns, who you are, Miss Munch. And now the snare is truly laid as she reads his face precisely. It registers every step she has taken for three months, every petty theft, knows her connections, her plans for the immediate future, has informed on the very dirt beneath her fingernails.

"We can discuss it further tomorrow."

He stands, carefully brushes the grass from his legs.

"Tomorrow?"

"Oh yes, you aren't leaving here, Perfidia. It's all over, you know."

That night she is subjected to more probing in her city laid waste. Every entry brings with it great pain and sensation, all quite new to her. She is given morphine and, as she fades, she explores herself again, discovering new furrows, new valleys and waterways. It occurs to her she is fighting for her life. Not against the riot squads and their smiling executives, or even Kropotkin and his pressure, but against the years, the years which have climbed on her, probed, scraped, left her as broken glass under their immense weight.

She is riding to sleep on the crest of her disaster. The clinic has become an instant prison into which she will wake in chains.

In the night she dreams her escape across the panorama of green, shearing the barbed wire as Kropotkin has taught in his lectures. She cannot cross the city in her hospital gown or she will raise suspicion. Instead, she makes her way to Mother Munch's, enters and rifles her wardrobes. Something startles her in the act and behind her stands the old woman with her breadknife. She has always faced her facelessly, hoping to remove herself from the elder's gaze. She has made chaos of her Mother's intentions. She ought, she feels, to be ashamed. But this time she can hold a stare; it states her case.

The breadknife cuts through the hospital garment and the old

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woman amuses herself with the naked body of this young girl, unwashed and curiously without eyebrows or hair. She can recognize contours in this body out of some obscure memory. With her long fingernails she draws blood on the girl's breast and elicits the scream which has hung suspended over the years. Her response is a cackle and Perfidia understands she has become a witch. From out of the marshes of her misery she has pulled forth a sort of madness, and built on it a viable ending for her life. She dabbles, these days, in the stars, finding puzzles and mythologies which bear her dying body along the roads of magic. She has turned her grief to mystic advantage and Perfidia feels a new and secret bond with this gypsy. Across her charts, she seems to be calling her to revolt, to ride the wind and accept the darkness of the days.

But she has merely come for the costumes. She dresses, again in the trappings of the 1940s and, as she turns to leave, presents the old woman with a vision of younger times, a recognition of her "soul" at the peripheries of its decay. To kiss each other now would be a gesture to sentiment designed to obscure their new covenant. Instead, the Mother has turned back to her triangles in a heat and the daughter has fled to her upheavals in a flash.

The threatening eyes of her emissary greet her in the cellar. Perfidia has calculated plenty of time before the event, but she is informed that the maneuver has been put forward, indeed, is imminent. Can she explain her disappearance? Not now. She is ready to perform. There is no room for dialogue; the performance is all.

She dresses, paints her face, puts on a blond wig. In the hazy mirror she has become her Mother.

The emissary now drives her, in a van with black windows, to a room where she will collect her explosive device. Then she is told she will take her bomb to an electrical works on the city's perimeter, carry it in a handbag and leave it in a second-floor Ladies Toilet. Perfidia asks if she must wait until the building is cleared. On the contrary, she is told, this bomb must take lives. When she sees the face of Kropotkin behind the device, she knows it is his decision. He stares at her absently as he sets the time mechanism and hands her the package. Before she leaves he goes to her and adjusts her wig, then hands her a folded piece of tissue paper in which she finds two eyebrows.

On the way, she understands at last the gravity of her objective.

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She is called upon to disrupt the power, to turn institutional murder in upon itself. Yet, she must constantly adjust the wig, which the hands of Kropotkin have thrown into permanent disarray. She feels unclean and the cake of her face weighs on her cheeks like cloth. It occurs to her she is without her knife, lost somewhere perhaps in the garden of the clinic or taken by the investigating policeman.

At the gates of the intended building she is struck by migraine.

She walks through the gaze of the Security Guard, explaining that she has come to see her husband, a certain Mr. Y. who works in the plant, no, there is no need to call him, she knows the way, lovely new carpets (she has been told to say), whatever happened to nice Mr. D. who worked as a guard last year — to establish an identity.

She places the bomb with five minutes to spare. She goes to the mirror, a woman's mirror in a woman's white porcelain room, and in it discovers an eyebrow dangling from the outside of her eye like a worm. She knows, in the feel of it, that it has been so for some time.

Outside the door she hears voices, and her failure is written on the night. The explosion is now three minutes away and she freezes at her edges. In her head a pulse, like the slow crack of the sea, is gathering its thunder. She rushes to the sink and washes her face clean of its mildew. Also, she scrubs her neck of its rust, watching the bomb lever twist closer to holocaust. As the towel unveils, in its drying, a chalky whiteness stares back at her. Voices are mumbling at the door in anticipation, she hears the running of feet, the shrill echo of police whistles. She feels she is gaining a laceration in the heart of Power. Will she gain the Power? She doesn't know.

Again she tries her mirror. The face she sees has accepted nothing, wants nothing. It watches the explosive in its final minute, now the ticking is her troll-lover, prodding her with his sex. They are pounding on the door for her to come out, smiling killer police who will not enter a lady's sanctuary for their embarrassment. It is the world of their embarrassment and its antiface, their brutality, she must unmake. Without eyebrows, if necessary.

No. She does not want the Power, and she leaps. The policeman, the same who has incarcerated her, catches her as she pushes into the hallway. She fights against him for cover. She wants, she thinks,

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to live. She tries to warn him of the bomb, but he holds her mouth fast because women bite. Women do such things.

She hears a crack, two, three, and the policeman falls from her. Kropotkin stands over them with his pistol and strips the dead man of his identity card to add to his collection. He appears unconcerned about the bomb and indeed the ticking has stopped and there is no explosion.

"It was a test."

She fumbles in her narcosis and dreams now of Kropotkin's grin on the day of his execution. Her masses of hair tumble behind her as she rides to the secluded wood on her bicycle. These are the woods of the 1940s where her Mother has described the lurkings of rape and masturbation and now, as then, she drifts to them in fascination. The willows overhang the small ponds polluted now with dead frogs where she once walked with Father Munch when the War had ended, as they say. In this thickness she has discovered her secret anguish and kept it to herself, for herself. All the dreadful mini-deaths of the woman she has unlocked here. And Father Munch walks here no more. The world is without men once again and the crackle of times long ago is with her.

She comes upon a lake and swims in it naked to limber her body and, on its banks, she performs her ballet lessons, thrusting her legs to the air in postures of angular composure. Her dance is private and yet the world holds its breath in the camouflaging leaves.

She finds the sisters in the appointed place and a calm Kropotkin, manacled to a tree, blows her a mocking kiss. She has kept them waiting, is reprimanded and finally asked to carry out her task. She is handed his own pistol and she goes to him at his tree. He looks up as she holds the gun to his head, challenging her in a final moment. A softness, like hair, touches her in her secret places and a laughter overwhelms her. She sits down by a pool, with her feet in the cool water. A sister collects the gun from her as Kropotkin shrieks her enduring weakness to the decades. He goes to his death believing this as the sister spatters his brains about the forest. Perfidia, similing back over her shoulder, no longer feels the need to bury his eyes separately and far away. There is nothing to live up to, nothing at all to prove.

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Philip Roth

READING MYSELF

To begin, how extreme a departure from your previous fiction is The Great American Novel*?*

If *The Great American Novel* is an extreme departure, it's because the tendency to comedy that's been present even in my most somber books and stories, has been allowed to take complete charge of my imagination and lead it where it may. I don't think I was any less farcical, blatant, and coarse-grained in *Our Gang,* but that book, aimed at a precise target, had a punitive purpose that inevitably restricted the range of humorous possibilities. And in *Portnoy's Complaint,* though the comedy may have been what was most obvious about the novel, strains of pathos, nostalgia, and (as I see it) evocative lyricism, worked to qualify the humor and to place the monologue in a reasonably familiar setting, literary and psychological; comedy was the means by which the character synthesized and articulated his sense of himself and his predicament.

In *The Great American Novel* the satiric bull's-eye has been replaced by a good-sized imaginary world more loosely connected to the actual than in *Our Gang.* And except for the "Prologue" and "Epilogue," the comedy is not turned on and off, or on and on, by a self-conscious narrator using humor to shape your (and his) idea of himself, as in *Portnoy's Complaint.* Widening the focus, and by and large removing the comedian himself from the stage, has resulted in a less constrained kind of comic invention. The comedy here is not softened or mitigated by the familiar human presence it flows through and defines, nor does the book try to justify whatever is reckless about it by claiming some redeeming social or political value. It follows its

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own comic logic — the logic of farce, of burlesque, of slapstick — rather than the logic or demands of a political satire, or of an individual, "integrated" psychology.

But there is certainly satire in this novel, directed, however playfully, at aspects of American popular mythology. The comedy may not be so free of polemical intent, or even of "redeeming" social or moral value as you might like to think. And why would you want to think that anyway?

The comedy in *The Great American Novel* exists for the sake of no "higher" value than comedy itself; the "redeeming" value is not social or cultural reform, or moral instruction, but *comic inventiveness.* Destructive, or lawless, playfulness — and for the fun of it.

Now there is an art to this sort of thing that distinguishes it from sadism, nonsense, or even nihilism for the fun of it; however, the sadistic, the nonsensical, and the nihilistic are strong ingredients in the making of such comedy, and in the enjoyment of it. I don't like the word "satiric" because the suggestion of cruel means employed for a higher purpose doesn't square with what I felt myself to be doing; it's too uplifting. "Satyric," suggesting the sheer pleasure of exploring the anarchic and the unsocialized, is more like it.

I think that the direction my work has taken since *Portnoy's Complaint* can in part be accounted for by my increased responsiveness to, and respect for, what is unsocialized in me. I don't mean that I am interested in propagandizing for the anarcho-libidinists in our midst; rather, that *Portnoy's Complaint,* which was concerned, in a general sense, with the comic side of the struggle between a hectoring superego and an ambitious id, seems now, in retrospect, to have realigned those forces as they act upon my imagination.

Can you explain why you are trying to come on like a bad boy — although in the manner of a very good boy indeed? Why quarrel, in decorous tones no less, with decorum? Why insist, in balanced sentences, on libido? Why "reckless" and "anarchic" to describe one's work, rather than "responsible," and "serious," and "humane"? In "Writing About Jews," the essay you published in Commentary *in 1962, answering charges of "self-hatred" and "anti-Semitism," your argument consisted almost entirely of an attempt to demonstrate your* righteousness *through the evidence of your work. Does that now seem to you so much defensive obfuscation?*

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No, it expressed concerns central to the stories under attack; and my rhetoric then, far from being borrowed to obfuscate the issue, was all too close at hand, the language of a preoccupation with conscience, responsibility, and rectitude, rather grindingly at the center of *Letting Go,* the novel I was writing in those years.

At that time, still in my twenties, I imagined fiction writing to be something like a religious calling, and literature a kind of sacrament — a sense of things I have had reason to modify since. Such elevated notions aren't uncommon in vain young writers; in my case they dovetailed nicely with ideas of ethical striving that I had absorbed as a Jewish child, and with the salvationist literary ethos in which I had been introduced to high art in the fifties, a decade when cultural, rather than political loyalties, divided the young into the armies of the damned and the cadre of the blessed. I might turn out to be a bad artist, or no artist at all, but having declared myself *for* art — the art of Tolstoy, James, Flaubert, and Mann, whose appeal was as much in their heroic literary integrity as in their works — I imagined I had sealed myself off from being a morally unacceptable person, in others' eyes as well as my own. The last thing I expected, having chosen this vocation — *the* vocation — was to be charged with heartlessness, vengeance, malice, and treachery. Yet that was to be one of the first experiences of importance to befall me out in the world. Ambitious and meticulous (if not wholly enlightened) in conscience, I had gravitated to the genre that constituted the most thoroughgoing investigation of conscience that I knew of — only to be told by more than a few Jews that I was a conscienceless young man holding attitudes uncomfortably close to those of the Nazis. As I saw it then, at twenty-seven, I had to argue in public and in print that I was not at all what they said I was; the characterization was ill-founded, I explained, and untrue, and yes, I maintained that Conscience and Righteousness were the very words emblazoned upon the banner I believed myself to be marching under, as a writer *and* as a Jew.

I think now — I didn't then — that this conflict with my Jewish critics was as valuable a struggle as I could have had at the outset of my career. For one thing it yanked me, screaming, out of the classroom; all one's readers, it turned out, weren't New Critics, sitting on their cans at Kenyon. Some people out there took what one wrote to *heart* — and wasn't that as it should be? I resented *how* they read

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me but I was never able to complain afterwards that they didn't read me; I never felt neglected. Also, this attack from certain Jewish critics and readers, along with personal difficulties I was having during those years, made me begin to understand that admiration for me and my mission on earth was, somewhat to my surprise, going to be less than unanimous, and probably hardest to win closest to hearth and homeland. Above all, I came eventually to realize that my way of taking myself seriously was more at odds than I ever could have imagined with what others believed "seriousness" to be. In time (more time probably than it should have taken), I became aware of enormous differences of *sensibility* between my Jewish critics and myself — a good deal of the disagreement, I realized, had to do with somewhat antithetical systems of aversion and tolerance, particularly with respect to subjects that are conventionally described as "distasteful."

In brief, the opposition was instructive — partly because opposition wasn't all that my early work aroused. However, one shouldn't conclude that a friendly, or enthusiastic, readership functions as a kind of countervailing soporific, or "ego trip," for the writer. The greatest value of an appreciative audience may even be the irritant that it provides, specifically by its collective (therefore simplistic) sense of the writer, the place it chooses for him to occupy on the cultural pecking order, and the uses it wants to make of selective, disconnected elements of his work and of his own (imagined) persona. Like antagonistic opposition, the amiable irritant is useful insomuch as it arouses, in the service of the imagination, whatever is stubborn or elusive or even defiant in the writer's nature, whatever resents being easily digested. Almost invariably one's reaction *against* will exceed the necessities of one's work (certainly as they might narrowly be defined) and, in fact, the relationship with an attentive audience may even come, as in the case of J. D. Salinger on the one idiosyncratic extreme, and Norman Mailer on the other, to shape one's conduct, not only as a writer, but as a friend, a husband, a citizen, a colleague, etc. "Fame," Rilke wrote, "is no more than the quintessence of all the misunderstandings collecting around a new name." "Mailerism" and "Salingerism" are vigorous, highly conscious responses to that kind of misunderstanding: the first by assaulting the misunderstandings at their source, challenging their timidity and con-

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ventionality ("You think I'm bad? You don't know how bad! You think I'm a brute? Well, I'm a courtly gentleman! You think I'm a gentleman? I'm a brute!" and so on) as it were, deliberately *exceeding* the misunderstandings in an indefatigable act of public self–realization; the second, Salingerism, by refusing to be contaminated by misunderstanding in any way, even, if need be, by not being published. I would think that serious American novelists with a sense of an audience swing on a pendulum from Mailerism to Salingerism, each coming to rest (at any given moment) at a point on the arc that appears (and needless to say, a man can be wrong) to be congruent with his temperament and nourishing to the work.

To get back to that defense I made of my own work in *Commentary* in 1962 — in that essay I at one point evoked the name of Flaubert and the example of Emma Bovary, a memorable character, I said, because of the vividness and depth with which she was presented, and not because she was "representative" of the French middle–class ladies of her day; likewise, I went on, *my* characters were not intended to provide a "representative" sampling of Jews, though they were "well within the range of Jewish possibilities."

I wish now that instead of describing my intentions — or validating them — by a comparison to a revered artist out of the World Literature Pantheon, I had evoked the name of Henny Youngman, a Jewish nightclub and vaudeville comic, whose wisecracks, delivered in an offhand whine while playing atrociously on the violin from the stage of the Roxy, had impressed me beyond measure at the age of ten. But because it was precisely my "seriousness," my sense of proportion and consequence, that was under attack, I did not have the nerve to appear "frivolous" in any way. So much the worse for me; had I had it in me to admit, in just those circumstances, that it was to the low-minded and their vulgarity that I owed no less allegiance than I did to the high-minded with whom I truly did associate my intentions, I might at least have provided *myself* with a fuller description and explanation of the work I was doing, if a more repugnant one yet to those who disapproved of me.

Really, you think of yourself as a disciple of Henny Youngman?

I do now. Also of Jake the Snake H., a middle-aged master of invective and insult, and repository of lascivious neighborhood gossip (and, amazingly, the father of a friend of mine), who owned the

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corner candy store in those years when I much preferred the pinball machine to the company of my parents. I am also a disciple of my older brother's friend and Navy buddy, Arnold G., an unconstrained Jewish living-room clown whose indecent stories of failure and confusion in sex did a little to demythologize the world of the sensual for me in early adolescence . . . as Jake the Snake demythologized the world of the respectable . . . as Henny Youngman, whining about family and friends while eliciting laughable squeaks and yowls, instead of celestial song, from the violin (that very violin that was to make of every little Jewish boy, myself included, a world-famous, urbane, poetic, dignified, and revered Yehudi) as Henny Youngman demythologized our yearnings for cultural superiority — or for superiority through culture — and argued by his shlemieldom that it was in the world of domestic squabble and unending social compromise, rather than on the concert stage, that the Jews of his audience might expect to spend their lives.

Now later I also became the disciple of certain literature professors and their favorite texts. For instance, reading *The Wings of the Dove* all afternoon long in the graduate school library at the University of Chicago, I would discover myself as transfixed by James's linguistic tact and moral scrupulosity, as I had ever been by the coarseness, recklessness, and vulgar, aggressive clowning with which I was so taken during those afternoons and evenings in "my" booth at the corner candy store. As I now see it, one of my continuing problems as a writer has been to find the means to be true to these seemingly inimical realms of experience that I am strongly attached to by temperament and training — the aggressive, the crude, and the obscene, at one extreme, and something a good deal more subtle and, in every sense, refined, at the other. But that of course is a difficulty, or problem, that is not unique to any single American writer, certainly not in this day and age.

Back in 1939, Philip Rahv wrote a brief, incisive essay wherein he noted the opposition in American literature between "the thin, solemn, semiclerical culture of Boston and Concord," and "the low-life world of the frontier and the big cities," and accordingly grouped American writers around two polar types he called the "paleface" and the "redskin." According to Rahv's scheme, James was a paleface, as was T. S. Eliot: "The paleface continually hankers after religious

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norms, tending toward a refined estrangement from reality . . . at his highest level the paleface moves in an exquisite moral atmosphere, at his lowest he is genteel, snobbish, and pedantic." Whitman and Twain — and after them Anderson, Wolfe, Farrell, etc. — Rahv identified as redskins: "Their reactions are primarily emotional, spontaneous, and lacking personal culture . . . In giving expression to the vitality and to the aspirations of the people, the redskin is at his best; but at his worst he is a vulgar anti-intellectual, combining aggression with conformity, reverting to the crudest forms of frontier psychology."

Now what happened in postwar America is that a lot of redskins — if not to the wigwam, then to the candy store and the Borscht Belt born — went off to universties and infiltrated the Departments of English, till then almost exclusively the domain of the palefaces. All manner of cultural defection, conversion, confusion, enlightenment, miscegenation, parasitism, transformation, and combat ensued. This is not the place to go into all that studies in English and American literature meant, in personal and social terms, to that tribe of redskins like myself, from the semiliterate, semiassimilated reaches of urban Jewish society, or, for that matter, all that such Jews signified to those directing their studies (what a novel that would make!); the point for the moment is that the weakening of social and class constraints that was accelerated by World War II, and the cultural exchanges thus encouraged, has produced a number of writers, many of them now in their forties, who have to some degree reconciled what Rahv described as this "disunity of the American creative mind," though undoubtedly not in any way that is necessarily congenial to Philip Rahv, or even to the writers themselves. For what this "reconciliation" comes down to often is a feeling of being *fundamentally ill at ease in, and at odds with, both worlds,* though, hopefully, ill at ease with style, alert to the inexhaustible number of intriguing postures that the awkward may assume in public, and the strange means that the uneasy come upon to express themselves. In short: neither the redskin one was in the days of his innocence, nor the paleface one could never be in a million, or, to be more precise, 5,733 years, but rather, at least in my own case, what I would describe as a "redface."

To my mind, being a redface accounts as much as anything for the self-conscious and deliberate zig-zag that my own career has

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taken, each book veering sharply away from the one before, as though the author were mortified at having written it as he did and preferred to put as much light as possible between that kind of book and himself. Rahv in his essay reminds us that the contemporaries, Paleface James and Redskin Whitman, "felt little more than contempt for each other." The redface is in the position of sympathizing equally with both parties in their disdain for the other, and as it were recapitulating the argument within the body of his own work. He can never in good conscience opt for either of the disputants; indeed, bad conscience is the medium in which his literary sensibility moves. Thus the continuing need for self-analysis and self-justification.

Let's go back to Jake the Snake. In The Great American Novel, *your allegiance to him is obviously stronger than it is to Henry James, wouldn't you say?*

Yes, there is more of Jake the Snake in there than in *Letting Go* or in *When She Was Good*. Not that I regret now that I didn't approach those earlier books as I did *The Great American Novel*. Actually I don't know if I would ever have found my way to this "recklessness" if I hadn't first tried to dramatize, in a series of fictions, of which *When She Was Good* is one, the problematical nature of moral authority and of social restraint and regulation. Though I was not deliberate about this at all, it seems to me now that the question of who or what shall have influence and jurisdiction over one's life has concerned me in much of my work. From whom shall one receive the Commandments? The Patimkins? Lucy Nelson? Trick E. Dixon? These characters, as I imagined them, are hardly identical in the particulars of their lives, nor do they inhabit similar fictional worlds, but invariably the claim each makes to being the legitimate moral conscience of the community is very much what is at issue in the book. The degree to which irony, pathos, ridicule, humor, or solemnity permeates *Goodbye, Columbus, When She Was Good,* and *Our Gang,* seems to me now to have been determined by what I took to be the dubiousness (and relative danger) of that claim.

The question of moral sovereignty, as it is examined in *Letting Go, Portnoy's Complaint,* and *The Breast,* is really a question of the kind of commandment the hero of each book will issue to himself; here the skepticism is directed inwards, upon the hero's ambiguous sense of personal imperatives and taboos. I can think of these char-

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acters — Gabe Wallach, Alexander Portnoy, and David Kepesh — as three stages of a single explosive projectile that is fired into the barrier that forms one boundary of the individual's identity and experience: that barrier of personal inhibition, ethical restraint, and plain old conformism and fear, beyond which lies the moral and psychological unknown. Gabe Wallach crashes up against the wall and collapses; Portnoy proceeds on through the fractured mortar, only to become lodged there, half in, half out; it remains for Kepesh to pass right on through the bloodied hole, and out the other end, into no-man's-land.

To sum up: the comic "recklessness" that I've identified with my old mentor, Jake the Snake, the indecent candy store owner, apparently could not develop to its utmost, until the *subject* of restraints and taboos had been dramatized in a series of increasingly pointed fictions that revealed the possible consequences of banging your head against your own wall.

Did it help the anarchic spirit along any to be writing about baseball, a morally "neutral" subject, rather than about Jews, say, or sexual relations?

Maybe; though before beginning this novel, I wrote a long story entitled "On the Air," in which a small-time Jewish theatrical agent is put through a series of grotesque adventures, some violently sexual, that were as extreme in their comedy as anything imagined in *The Great American Novel.* But it was only a story, and perhaps I couldn't carry it further because the dreadful comic fantasies of persecution and humiliation depicted there were, to my mind, decidedly "Jewish." Though it just could be that the story wasn't cut out to be any more than it was.

I think one reason I have finally written a novel about baseball is because it happens to be one of the few subjects that I know much about. If I knew as much about forestry, music, ironmongering, or the city of Rotterdam, I am sure I would have written novels grounded in that knowledge long ago. I have not gotten around sooner to a subject as close to me as this one because I had thought that it could not be made to yield very much, the old bugaboo once again of "seriousness," or profundity. Over the last fifty years some very gifted writers had gotten quite a yield, of course — Ring Lardner, Mark Harris, and Bernard Malamud particularly — but despite my admiration for their ingenuity (and the pleasure I took in baseball

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stories by writers as good, and as serious, as Isaac Rosenfeld and J. F. Powers) a certain snobbishness about the material held my own imagination in check.

What changed your mind?

The point I had reached in my own career: the confidence I had developed in my literary impulses, combined with the experience of the sixties, the "demythologizing" decade.

This confidence expressed itself partly in a greater willingness to be deliberately, programmatically, perverse — subversive not merely of the "serious" values of official literary culture (such subversion, after all, is the standard stuff of our era, if not the new convention) but subversive of my own considerable investment (witness this interview) in seriousness. Gradually the *least* promising material began to seem to me the most attractive, material unlike, say, what Malamud may have had in mind when, upon accepting the National Book Award for *The Fixer,* he quoted from Melville to the effect that "a great book demands a great subject." It was a hard notion to take at face value anyway from a writer as perverse as Melville, who after all wrote *his* great book on the subject of whaling. From the evidence of *Moby Dick* (and works such as *Ulysses, Dead Souls,* and *The Castle*) a great book seemed to require that the least likely subject be converted into a marvelous one by a singular act of imagination that had nothing to do with the general estimate of the subject's worth.

But as unappealing for me as the idea of "a great subject" was the idea of "a great book." Just think of the writers who had ruined perfectly good books, odd books, eccentric books, *interesting* books, trying to make them into "great books." Think of the careers, some in our very midst, stunted, or stultified, even wrecked, by that kind of aspiration. Suppose, instead, a writer set himself the task of *not* writing a great book. Well, chances were he couldn't miss, for one thing; there was that to recommend it. But for someone like me, with his strong allegiance to universities *and* to *the* great books, a writer well indoctrinated in the great fictional tradition of moral seriousness, whose own early sense of his vocation was not without its priestly (and princely) side, there might be something to be gained by working against the grain of his own awe — and pretensions — and, as it were, demythologizing his own notions of what constituted literary "greatness."

I had been at something like this now for a while — particularly

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in the chapter in *Portnoy's Complaint* called "Whacking Off," in much of *Our Gang,* in "On the Air" — but I still had not come anywhere near being as thoroughgoingly *playful* as I now aspired to be. In an odd way — maybe not so odd at that — I set myself the goal of becoming the writer some Jewish critics had been telling me I was all along: irresponsible, conscienceless, *unserious.* Ah, if only they knew what that entailed! And the personal triumph that such an achievement in folly would represent! The quotation from Melville that became intriguing to me was from a letter he had sent to Hawthorne upon completing *Moby Dick:* "I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as the lamb." Now I knew that no matter how hard I tried I could never really hope to be wicked; but perhaps if I worked long and hard and diligently, I could be frivolous. And what could be more frivolous, *in my own estimation,* than writing a novel about sports.

If perversity, contrariness, my pursuit of the unserious helped to relax my "snobbishness" about baseball as a subject for a novel, the decade we had just been through furnished me with the handle by which to take hold of it. Not that I knew that at the outset, or even, in so many words, at the conclusion; but I knew it. I'll try to explain.

Earlier on I described the sixties as the demythologizing decade. I mean by this that much that had previously been considered in my own brief lifetime to be disgraceful and disgusting forced itself upon the national consciousness, loathsome or not; what was assumed to be beyond reproach became the target for blasphemous assault; what was imagined to be indestructible, impermeable, in the very nature of American things, yielded and collapsed overnight. The shock to the system was enormous — not least for those like myself who belong to what may have been the most propagandized generation of young people in American history, those whose childhoods were dominated by World War II, and whose high school and college years were colored by the worst of the Cold War years —Berlin, Korea, Joe McCarthy; also the first American generation to bear the full brunt of the mass media and advertising. Mine was of course no *more* gullible than any other generation of youngsters — it's only that we had *so* much to swallow, and that it was stuffed into us by the most ingenious methods of force-feeding yet devised to replace outright physical torture. The generation known in its college years as "silent" was ac-

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tuality straightjacketed, at its most dismal bound by the sort of pieties, fantasies, and "values" that one might expect to hear articulated today only by a genuine oddball like Tricia Nixon.

Even to have been a dissident, highly skeptical member of that generation did not make one any better prepared than the straightjacketed to absorb the shocks and upheavals of post-Oswald America . . . for in retrospect the first act of demythologizing committed in the decade seems to me to have been the "demythologizing" of John F. Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald. The re-mythologizing of Kennedy began the instant the last shot had been fired, but once the president of "Camelot," as they called it, was pronounced dead, the point about the vulnerability and mortality of the "charismatic" and the indestructible had been made; it remained for Sirhan Sirhan to demythologize Bobby Kennedy, and for the lesser characters like Jackie and Teddy Kennedy to demythologize themselves, the one with Aristotle Onassis and the other with Mary Jo Kopechne, for the decade to turn completely inside out this particular legend of glamour and power and righteousness.

Disorienting, shocking, all this may have been, but it did not begin to work deeply to test or alter one's ties to America; Vietnam did that. To have been trained to be a patriotic schoolchild on the rhetoric of World War II, to have developed an attachment to this country in good part on the basis of the myth *and* reality of that wartime America, made my own spiritual entanglement with this wartime America probably more like Lyndon Johnson's than Jerry Rubin's. That I came eventually to despise Johnson did not mean that I was impervious, ever, to his sense, which I took to be genuine, that the America whose leader he was, simply could not be on the wrong side, even if for some God damn reason everything seemed to look that way. No, it could not be, cried the America of World War II — "Say it ain't so, Lyndon." Instead he went on television and said it was, in the only real way he was ever able to admit it publicly, by washing his hands of the whole hideous mess. The last of the decade's great demythologizers, L.B.J. *Après lui,* the bullshit artists once again.

All that by way of background. Here's what I'm getting at: the fierce, oftentimes wild and pathological assault launched in the sixties against venerable American institutions and beliefs, and even more to the point, the emergence of a counterhistory, or *countermythology,*

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to challenge the mythic sense of itself the country continued to have when the decade opened with General Eisenhower, our greatest World War II hero, still presiding — it was these social phenomena that furnished me with a handle by which to take hold of baseball, of all things, and place it at the center of a novel. It was not a matter of demythologizing baseball — there was nothing in that to get fired up about — but of discovering in baseball the means to dramatize *the struggle* between the benign national myth of itself that a great power prefers to perpetuate, and the relentlessly insidious, very nearly demonic reality (like the kind we had known in the sixties) that simply will not give an inch in behalf of that idealized mythology.

Now the discovery of thematic reverberations, of depth, of overtone, finally of meaning, gradual and tenuous as it was, would seem to contradict what I have said about wanting fundamentally to be unserious; and it does. It seems to me that out of this opposition, or rather out of the attempt to maintain these contradictory impulses in a state of contentious equilibrium, the book evolved. Sustaining this sort of opposition is not simply a mechanical means of creating literary energy, either; hopefully, it is expressive of one's deepest doubts and beliefs. It is not a matter, in a novel like this, of hiding or burying meaning through allegorical or metaphorical techniques, but of being as skeptical of the "truth" turned up by your imagination as of the actuality that may have served as inspiration or model. A full-scale farce is rarely directed outward only, but takes its own measure as well; much of its inventiveness goes into calling itself into question as a "statement," satiric, or humane, or what have you. In this sense, the genre is the message, and the message is agnostic: "I tell you, (and I tell you and I tell you), I don't know."

An early reader of my book, meaning to offer praise, told me "This is what America is really like." I would have been happier if he said, "This is what a farce written in America is really like." Now *that* is praise. I don't claim to know what America is "really like." In fact, *not* knowing, or no longer knowing for sure, is just what perplexes many of the people who live and work here and consider this country home. That, if I may say so, is precisely why I invented that paranoid fantasist Word Smith — the narrator who calls himself Smitty — to be (purportedly) the author of *The Great American Novel*. What he describes is what America is really like to one like *him*.

Now I do not mean by this to disown the novel, or to pretend,

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defensively, that it is what is called a "put-on." Who would I be trying to put on? And why? By attributing the book to Smitty, I intended, among other things, to call into question the novel's "truthfulness" — to mock any claim the book might appear to make to be delivering up *the* answer — though in no way is this strategy intended to discredit the book itself. The idea is simply to get the focus off the question, "What *is* America really like?" and on to the kind of fantasy (or rewriting of history) that a question so troublesome and difficult has tended of late to inspire. I would not want to have to argue that Smitty's is the true dream of our lives, his paranoia the wedge into our enigmatic American reality; I would claim, however, that his is not so unlike the sort of fantasies with which the national imagination began to be plagued during this last demythologizing decade of disorder, upheaval, assassination, and war.

Why I finally anchored the book in the investigations into Communist activities conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee was to give Smitty a break, too; as far off in an American never-never land as he may come to seem with his story of the destruction of the imaginary Ruppert Mundys of the imaginary Patriot League, his version of history has its origins in something that we all recognize as *having taken place,* and moreover, at a similar level of bizarre, clownish inventiveness as so much of the "real" American history that Smitty has obviously invented out of whole cloth. I was trying, then, to establish at the conclusion of the book a kind of passageway from the imaginary that seems real to the real that seems imaginary, a continuum between the credible incredible and the incredible credible. This seems to me an activity something like what many deranged laymen must engage in every morning, reading the newspaper on the one hand and swooning over the prophetic ingenuity of their paranoia on the other. Truly, it is the Land of Opportunity — now even the nuts are getting an even break.

So, to conclude: Smitty is to my mind correct in aligning himself with Melville and Hawthorne, whom he calls "my precursors, my kinsmen." They too were in search of some encapsulating fiction, or legend, that would, in its own oblique, charged, and cryptic way, constitute "the truth" about the national disease. Smitty's book, like those of his illustrious forebears, attempts to imagine a myth of an ailing America; my own is to some extent an attempt to imagine a book about imagining that American myth.

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POEMS

ONE OF YOU

There are some men who have deserted life,
who finally couldn't stand the taste
and spit it out. Something in them is broken
in such a way that only death can heal it,
or worse. Sometimes you see one in a Mexican village
walking aimlessly, regarding creation
with a slack stare while all around him sit
the small dark inhabitants of the place,
taut bellies, eaters of suffering. One night,
he walks for hours, out past the lighted doorways
and faint snatches of incomprehensible speech
to where the darkness is total and the life
he wanted to remember breathes in the grass
which he can't see. He gets down on his knees
under the dancing stars, and on his hands
and vomits the last of it up.

In the morning he will order breakfast, hands
curled on the spotless linen, face
facing the empty sunlight—but it's the meal
after the last and you will not recognize him.
He is back, and he is one of you again.

Robert Mezey

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TO WHAT WATCHING WITH ATTENTION REVEALS

The mirrors reflect,
they don't retain
it is impossible
to get into the body of a mirror
or to have the mirror penetrating us,
and we perceive the emptiness
emptied of the painful
instants of unfitness
for keeping, retaining,
emptiness
that relieves apprehensions
the apprehension of accepting favors
apprehension in our misfortune.

Stillness and emptiness
like navigating the ocean
on a shadow,
birds,
compelling themselves to silence
so that no song
travels in their emptiness,
and that food, heat,
gained on being lost
and lost on being acquired,
result in a vacuum,
emptiness,
neither without, nor with, nor inside,
nor in the middle,
void without dualism, hollowness,
without one and two.

Alberto Girri

Translated by Mauricio Schoijet.

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MAIN STREETS

These are the days that must happen to you.
—WALT WHITMAN

1
I wake from hours of water,
cats screaming for perfection,
the old woman upstairs lowered
into bed by God with a nasal cough
and one good leg. Already
the nearest bar loud with gorillas.

I wake, he wakes, we wake, they.
I would forget this city's name
if I could remember it; in three days
Christmas, the world full
of goodwill.

2
Who said longing knew night from day?
Success a tooth that can't be filled,
this morning the sun stabbed me in the back;
fate a horny cowboy undecided
which house to burn, which jaw to break.
Bad signs. Mama,

pour the soup, I'm on my way,
make ready, a new day, believe me,
why should he lie?

3
My front window opens
on Saturday afternoon, drinkers waltz
down Burdick Street, one old father
this noon opened his fly
for an old mother lugging laundry,
she spat at it, Act your age, she said.

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Always the next morning,
time to feed the cats who want in
so they can want out, this country
has no traditions, I think,
just connected Main Streets.

4
Picked up a little number
last night, she said You
dangerous man you, only
seventeen, her hands did
all the talking, my need
showed its teeth, Relax she said
you only live once, as it goes
the next morning the last
taste sweet but fading,
like all dirty old men
I expect the police.

5
The midwest one long winter,
Russian Jews not allowed on the Mall at night,
probably for good reason.

The spirit finds its own step.
I know Marilyn Monroe is dead,
that I'm not the first man on the moon,
the grinding in my groin tells me so. Mama,
I've been drinking again, storefronts sprint
and speakers hum Thanksgiving morning noon and night.

Philip Schultz

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WILD-MAN & THE RHYTHM OF THE MECHANIZED SYSTEM

who belongs Devout
thousand rebirths mix
a few seeds
three days
thick at the top
how do these plants digest in full Sun /

6 submarines
fast frigates
1 battalion one onion
12 fast roses & a shower of s p e e d i n g
meteors 1 reconnaissance squadron 15 minesweepers

helpless in
the line of duty a
man dies
head sticking out of cement
/ it's a thrilling once-in-a-lifetime-
spectacle!
suck rubber & chop timber
/ steel plants & the coming
Afrikanization of 12 hens & 24 cheeses / O Boy!

a man with ideas
& a man whistling
in the light / tyme
of revolution
& bloody experience /

What about the
equipment
what about the fish throw them back in the Sea.

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while the
gap
could
lead
to
Fearing Things

O Motor Vehicle
O Radio Station
O Meat & Wool
O Major Airline
O Sacred Mechanized
System
o' bliss!

Rochelle Owens

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SENECA JOURNAL 2

The Great White Beaver

a boy who had lived with his
grandfather
those old days when witches
killed off the rest had learned
to hunt & taking
's first deer the song
became a great "solemnity"
now could hunt like a man
but warned him
not to be going toward the east
deceitful women lived there
would kill him (which the boy did
eagerly first found a hollow tree
home of raccoons & stripped naked dug
down in that tree hole
with a stick he scooped them out
& turned & as the dream
had told him he saw upon a log seated
with legs apart a naked woman
just a girl her first words brought him
halfway down tree her next
enticed him to the far end of
the log & when he moved
beside her would tell him
stories of wonders magic powers
sleep had overcome him
& put him in a bag across her shoulder
woke at his grandfather's
she had him point to something
he could remember
an old kettle set on poles

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to cook with
but won her with his eyes also
deep into hers
though later he would sleep
again & wake
this time on a narrow cliff under a mountain
"a place not wider than a deerskin"
hundreds of feet the earth
below him on all sides
were other mountains
bodies of men were lying on
alive or dead
some were skeletons from hunger
said / they had been brought there by
deceiving women
hungry picking flesh off of their bones)
& freedom
was a spider in a dream
a web that led him
to mountaintop where crazed
with love he fucked
the woman who had deceived him
daughter of a witch
the next day in a dream who told him
her Dreamtime Being came (said)
your son-in-law must kill the Great White Beaver
go to the magic waters
with its flesh must make feast for those
who seed the whirlwind (which the boy
did a single arrow
shot & killed it
the magic waters rising

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in pursuit could burn off
flesh from bones
but made it back home & threw
carcass of White Beaver
on the ground
an end to water but the woman
cries / that beaver
was my son
that Great White Beaver!
that magician
) now whose flesh was cooked
& whirlwind men
rolling heads with long hair
& flaming eyes
came there sucking the beaver flesh
down to its bones
until the woman cried out
in a rage
& drove them from
her home entered
a sweat house he had built for her
would die among its
white hot stones

Jerome Rothenberg

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FICTION NOW

I. Raymond Federman

SURFICTION—A POSITION

PROPOSITION ONE — *The Nature of Fiction*

Writing about fiction today, one could begin with the usual clichés — that the novel is dead; that fiction is no longer possible because real fiction happens everyday. But in what sense is life fiction? Fiction is made of words, and language creates meaning as it goes along. To write is to *produce* meaning and not to *reproduce* a preexisting meaning. Fiction cannot be reality, or a representation of reality, or an imitation, or even a recreation of reality, it can only be *a reality* — an autonomous reality whose only relation with the real world is to improve that world. To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth.

In the fiction of the future, all distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between the conscious and the subconscious, between the past and the present, between truth and untruth, will be abolished. The primary purpose of fiction will be to unmask its own fictionality, to expose the metaphor of its own fraudulence, and not pretend any longer to pass for reality, for truth, or for beauty. Consequently, fiction will no longer be regarded as a mirror of life, as a pseudorealistic document that informs us about life, nor will it be judged on the basis of its social, moral, psychological, metaphysical, commercial value, or whatever, but on the basis of what it is and what it does as an autonomous art form in its own right.

PROPOSITION TWO — *The Reading of Fiction*

The very act of reading a book, starting at the top of the first page and moving from left to right, top to bottom, page after page to the end in a consecutive prearranged manner, has become *boring*

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and *restrictive*. Indeed, any intelligent reader should feel frustrated and restricted within that preordained system of reading. Therefore, the whole traditional, conventional, fixed, and boring method of reading a book must be questioned, challenged, demolished. And it is the writer (and not modern printing technology) who must, through innovations in the writing itself — in the typography and topology of his writing — renew our system of reading. All the rules and principles of printing and bookmaking must be forced to change as a result of the changes in the writing (or the telling) of a story in order to give the reader a sense of free participation in the writing/reading process, in order to give the reader an element of choice (active choice) in the ordering of the discourse and the discovery of its meaning. Thus, the very concept of syntax must be transformed — the word, the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter, the punctuation need to be rethought and rewritten so that new ways (multiple and simultaneous ways) of reading a book can be created. And the space itself in which writing takes place must be changed. That space, the page (and the book made of pages), must acquire new dimensions, new shapes, new relations in order to accommodate the new writing. And it is within this transformed topography of writing, from this new paginal (rather than grammatical) syntax that the reader will discover his freedom in relation to the process of reading a book, in relation to language and fiction.

In all other art forms, there are three essential elements at play: the creator, the medium through which the work of art is transmitted from the creator, and the receiver (listener or viewer) to whom the work of art is transmitted. In the writing of fiction, we have only the first and third elements: the writer and the reader. Me and you. And the medium (language), because it is neither auditory nor visual (as in music, painting, and sometimes poetry), merely serves as a means of transportation from me to you, from my meaning to your understanding of that meaning. If we are to make of the novel an art form, we must raise the printed word as the medium, and therefore *where* and *how* it is placed on the printed page makes a difference in what the novel is saying. Thus, not only the writer creates fiction, but all those involved in the ordering of that fiction: the typist, the recorder, the printer, the proofreader, and the reader partake of the fiction, and the real medium becomes the printed word as it is presented on the page,

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as it is perceived, heard, read, visualized (not only abstractly but concretely) by the receiver.

PROPOSITION THREE — *The Shape of Fiction*

If life and fiction are no longer distinguishable one from the other nor complementary to one another, and if we agree that life is never linear — that, in fact, life is chaos because it is never experienced in a straight line — then, similarly, linear and orderly narration is no longer possible. The pseudorealistic novel sought to give a semblance of order to the chaos of life, and did so by relying on the well-made plot (the story line) which, as we now realize, has become quite inessential to fiction. The plot having disappeared, it is no longer necessary to have the events of fiction follow a logical, sequential pattern (in time and in space). Therefore, the elements of the new fictitious discourse (words, phrases, sequences, scenes, spaces, etc.) must become digressive from one another — digressive from the element that precedes and the element that follows. In fact, these elements will now occur simultaneously and offer multiple possibilities of rearrangement in the process of reading. The fictitious discourse, no longer progressing from left to right, top to bottom, in a straight line, and along the design of an imposed plot, will follow the contours of the writing itself as it takes shape (unpredictable shape) within the space of the page. It will circle around itself, create new and unexpected movements and figures in the unfolding of the narration, repeating itself, projecting itself backward and forward along the curves of the writing (much here can be learned from the cinema — that of Jean-Luc Godard in particular). And consequently, the events related in the narration will also move along this distorted curve. The shape and order of fiction will not result from an imitation of the shape and order of life, but rather from the formal circumvolutions of language as it wells up from the unconscious. No longer a mirror being dragged along reality, fiction will now reproduce the effects of the mirror acting upon itself. It will no longer be a representation of something exterior to it, but self-representation. That is to say, rather than being the stable image of daily life, fiction will be in a perpetual state of redoubling upon itself. It is from itself, from its own substance that the fictitious discourse will proliferate — imitating, repeating, parodying, retracing what it says. Thus fiction will become the metaphor of its own narra-

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tion, and will establish itself as it writes itself. This does not mean, however, that the future novel will be only "a novel of the novel," but rather it will create a kind of writing, a kind of discourse whose shape will be an interrogation, an endless interrogation of what it is doing while doing it, an endless denunciation of its fraudulence, of what *it* really is: an illusion (a fiction), just as life is an illusion (a fiction).

PROPOSITION FOUR — *The Material of Fiction*

If the experiences of any man (in this case the writer) exist only as fiction, as they are recalled or recounted, afterwards, and always in a distorted, glorified, sublimated manner, then these experiences are inventions. And if most fiction is (more or less) based on the experiences of the one who writes (experiences which are not anterior to, but simultaneous with, the writing process), there cannot be any truth nor any reality exterior to fiction. In other words, if the material of fiction is invention (lies, simulations, or distortions), then writing fiction will be a process of inventing, on the spot, the material of fiction. The writer simply materializes (renders concrete) fiction into words. And as such, there are no limits to the material of fiction — no limits beyond the writer's power of imagination, and beyond the possibilities of language. Everything can be said, and must be said, in any possible way. While pretending to be telling the story of his life, or the story of any life, the fiction writer can at the same time tell the story of the story he is telling, the story of the language he is employing, the story of the methods he is using, the story of the pencil or the typewriter he is using to write his story, the story of the fiction he is inventing, and even the story of the anguish (or joy) he is feeling while telling his story. And since writing now means filling a space (the pages), in those spaces where there is nothing to write, the fiction writer can, at any time, introduce material (quotations, pictures, diagrams, designs, pieces of other discourses, doodles, etc.) totally unrelated to the story he is in the process of telling; or else, he can simply leave those spaces blank, because fiction is as much what is said as what is not said, since what is said is not necessarily true, and since what is said can always be said another way.

As a result, the people of fiction, the fictitious beings, will also no longer be well-made characters who carry with them a fixed identity, a stable set of social and psychological attributes — a name, a situation, a profession, a condition, etc. The creatures of the new fic-

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tion will be as changeable, as unstable, as illusory, as nameless, as unnameable, as fraudulent, as unpredictable as the discourse that makes them. This does not mean, however, that they will be mere puppets. On the contrary, their being will be more genuine, more complex, more true to life in fact, because they will not appear to be simply what they are, they will be what they are: word-beings. What will replace the well-made personage who carried with him the burden of a name, a social role, a nationality, parental ties, and sometimes an age and a physical appearance, will be a fictitious creature who functions outside any predetermined conditions. That creature will be, in a sense, present to his own absence. Totally free, totally uncommitted to the affairs of the outside world, to the same extent as the fiction in which he will exist (perform, that is), he will participate in the fiction only as a grammatical being (sometimes not even as a pronominal being). Made of fragments, disassociated fragments of himself, this new fictitious creature will be irrational, irresponsible, irrepressive, amoral, and unconcerned with the real world, but entirely committed to the fiction in which he finds himself, aware, in fact, only of his role as fictitious being. Moreover, not only the creator, but the characters (and the narrator, if any), as well as the reader, will participate in the creation of the fiction. All of them will be part of the fiction, all of them will be responsible for it — the creator (as fictitious as his creation) being only the point of junction (the source and the recipient) of all the elements of the fiction.

PROPOSITION FIVE — *The Meaning of Fiction*

It is obvious from the preceding propositions that the most striking aspects of the new fiction will be its semblance of disorder and incoherency. Since, as stated earlier, no meaning preexists language, but meaning is produced in the process of writing (and reading), the new fiction will not attempt to be meaningful, truthful, or realistic; nor will it attempt to serve as the vehicle of a ready-made meaning. On the contrary, it will be seemingly devoid of any meaning, it will be deliberately illogical, irrational, unrealistic, non sequitur, and incoherent. And only through the joint efforts of the reader and creator (as well as that of the characters and narrators) will a meaning possibly be extracted from the fictitious discourse. The new fiction will not create a semblance of order, it will offer itself for order and ordering. Thus the reader of this fiction will not be able to identify with its

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people and its material, nor will he be able to purify or purge himself in relation to the actions of the people in the story. In other words, no longer being manipulated by an authorial point of view, the reader will be the one who extracts, invents, creates a meaning and an order for the people in the fiction. And it is this total participation in the creation which will give the reader a sense of having created a meaning and not having simply received, passively, a neatly prearranged meaning. The writer will no longer be considered a prophet, a philosopher, or even a sociologist who predicts, teaches, or reveals absolute truths, nor will he be looked upon (admiringly and romantically) as the omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent creator, but he will stand on equal footing with the reader in their efforts to *make sense* out of the language common to both of them, to *give sense* to the fiction of life. In other words, as it was said of poetry, "fiction, also, will not only mean, but it will be!"

One should, I suppose, in conclusion to such a presentation, attempt to justify, or at least illustrate with examples, the propositions I just made for the future of fiction. However, justifications and illustrations are readily available. For, I must confess, I am not alone in dreaming up these wild imaginings. A number of contemporary writers, each in his own way, have already forged the way into this new type of fiction: Beckett, of course, in French and in English, Borges and Julio Cortázar in Spanish, Italo Calvino in Italian, Robert Pinget, Claude Simon, Philippe Sollers, Jean Ricardou, and many others in France, and in their own individual manner, a number of American writers such as Donald Barthelme, John Barth, John Hawkes, Ronald Sukenick, Steve Katz, Eugene Wildman, Richard Kostelanetz, Frederick Barthelme, Madeline Gins, and many others who deserve mention here. But perhaps it is preferable to let the reader (wherever he might be) reflect on these propositions, and discover for himself the fiction of which he has now become an integral part.

I do not pretend to have solved the problems of fiction, nor to have presented the only possible way for future fiction. I only know that this is the path, I, as a fiction writer, want to explore in order perhaps, not to succeed (commercially, socially, or otherwise), but in order to give fiction another chance, or, as Samuel Beckett once said, in order "to make of failure a howling success."

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II. Jerome Klinkowitz

LITERARY DISRUPTIONS; OR, WHAT'S BECOME OF AMERICAN FICTION?

Despite the American novel's conservative stability of form since the experiments of the 1920s, a group of new writers — including Ronald Sukenick, Donald Barthelme, Raymond Federman, and Jerzy Kosinski — has finally cleared the way for renewed experimentation in the American novel. Ronald Sukenick's latest novel, *Out*, may be the climax of the phenomenon as the new methods of fiction finally establish themselves in a tradition. Sukenick's object of art replaces "abstraction, reduction, essentials, separation, and stillness" with "inclusion, addition, the random, union, and movement." His model is the Indian shaman, Empty Fox, who shows him how his rational culture with its shabby pretense of signs — both linguistic and physical — has despoiled the West. "The Wasichus make Disneyland of all this so they can sell it they get the Indians to pretend they're Indians they make believe these beautiful mountains are beautiful they pretend that magic is magic they make believe the truth is the truth otherwise they can't believe anything. There is a place with a billboard of a mountain in front of the mountain you Wasichus can't see without pretending to see anyway you don't believe it. Anyway that's why you all have cameras you're not friends with your eyes only with your minds you can't understand this." The shaman's ambition becomes Sukenick's: "I want to write a book like a cloud that changes as it goes. I want to erase all the books. My ambition is to unlearn everything I can't read or write that's a start. I want to unlearn and unlearn till I get to the place where the ocean of the unknown begins where my fathers live. Then I want to go back and bring my people to live beside that ocean where they can

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be whole again as they were before the Wasichus came. That's why I like to travel this way."

Out follows two lines, tracing connections through a series of "meets" to some final meaning, while a narrator-character keeps talking to make a story. The messages he receives define his story: data accumulate obscurity persists, meaning disintegrates connection proliferates, speed increases space expands, enlightenment grows. He fears the desert, his own emptiness, the silence which resists the desperate need for connections, for words ("I love you"). He must keep talking, moving, crossing the Continental Divide, and posing new identities, true fictional constructs which synthesize experience without becoming it. "Red Desert for example that's where Roland Sycamore is staying now Roland Sycamore you don't know this yet peeled off from the Sukenick character after the karate fight and the latter is no longer a character at all but the real me if that's possible I'm getting out of this novel. When you fly too far you don't come back."

But things do come together. The two lines of the novel merge as the countdown of chapters decreases by numbers of printed lines versus lines of space (10–0, 9–1, 8–2, 7–3, etc.) until section 0: no lines, all space, and the book disappears in a conclusive silence.

Ronald Sukenick has moved beyond the impasse of conventional fiction, where objective realism (whether photographic, sociological, or psychological) and subjective lyricism debated each other's claim to the real thing, to fiction at its simplest best. *Out* gives us action, adventure, humor, and wisdom without the pitiful lie that it has all really happened, or that it signifies anything other than what it most apparently is. Viewed from the complexities of theory or the most basic of constituents, *Out* is pure fiction, free from the representational burdens which of all the arts seem to have prejudiced fiction the most, and which have kept the American novel within such close bounds so long.

Because of his regular *New Yorker* publication, Donald Barthelme is the most popular and the most apparent writer of this new disruptionist group. For several years in the late 1950s Barthelme "wrote poppycock for the president of a university," as he recalls in his story, "See the Moon?" He convinced his boss that the best format for this poppycock was a literary quarterly, and so Barthelme

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became founding editor of the *University of Houston Forum.* Here one finds the first traces of Barthelme's art — like his most recent experiments, collages made of such simple yet subtle components as Mother Whistler stolidly gazing past a portrait of Bugs Bunny. The subliminal scrawl of "Kilroy was here" marks Barthelme's style from those days to the present.

He was passing from this to his next position as editor of the art journal *Location,* when his first national publication appeared, a review of the *39th Annual of Advertising and Editorial Art Design* for *Harper's* in October 1961. Looking over the year's best ads, he noted that many "give not so much as a clue to what is being advertised." The award-winning spreads were nothing but form, with content "typically nowhere in sight." But Barthelme knew they were making millions, striking to the core of a new American sensibility, and so it is not surprising that when his own short stories began to appear the same year, their theme and technique followed the same direction.

His basic concern was with the forms of language, even the sounds of words, and he practiced clever disruptions to make people see what was really happening before their eyes and ears. Many stories played with puns, while others were suggestively disconcerting, but in all cases readers were forced to think deeper of the "poppycock" they were accustomed to hear. "We have rots, blights, and rusts capable of attacking [the enemy's] alphabet," boasts an engineer in "Report"; he has also studied "the area of realtime online computer-controlled wish evaporation," for the simple reason that "wish evaporation is going to be crucial in meeting the rising expectations of the world's peoples, which are as you know rising entirely too fast." Some of Barthelme's early *New Yorker* stories, never collected, are academic exercises in the uses of language. In these early stories Barthelme would seize a conventional, accepted structure and inject it with a dose of absurdity, such as using the familiar form of *TV Guide* to compose a single-page, forty-chapter novel ("On a field trip, Timmy finds a rock," announces a program note–chapter; Chapter XVI reads, "Sandy Koufax and Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey discuss ambergris").

With an absolute sense of the shape of sentences and even words, Barthelme found that he could shock readers into a new awareness

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of the world. For this subject *Snow White* (1967) is his thematic tour de force. The foremost theme of the book is words. "Oh I wish there were some words in the world that were not the words I always hear!" Snow White laments, but she hears only the same old ones, because "I have not been able to imagine anything better." She needs, of course, her prince, but her world is essentially "princeless." It prizes, instead, "equanimity," for anything else would be "bad for business." Its language, we learn, is ninety-nine percent "blanketing," the part of language which "fills in" between the other parts. " 'That part,' " we are told, " 'the "filling" you might say, of which the expression "you might say" is a good example, is to me the most interesting part.' " Of particular importance are " 'those aspects of language that may be seen as a model of the trash phenomenon,' " aspects which are largely the substance of *Snow White*. Hers is a world of "dreck," of unimaginative life where no one responds to her "hair initiative" because "Americans will not or cannot see themselves as princely."

In a world of one hundred percent trash, its imagination dead and its language simply "blanketing," how does one break through all the blanketing, trash, and *dreck* to a happier reality one hopes would remain beneath? Barthelme's form provides the answer, and in several self-consciously experimental stories written after *Snow White* he plans an epistemological strategy to get at the heart of things. "Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning," his most famous story, demonstrates the problem. It is an attempt to understand one of the most "blanketed" and obscured events in our recent history, the substance and appeal of the most enigmatic of politicians, and Barthelme's form expresses the near impossibility of the task. Gathering notes from all available sources, the story tries to tell what the man was. In individually subtitled paragraphs, K., as he is called, is observed at his Justice Department desk, in public affairs, and at his home, but his behavior seems totally ambiguous. Reports are taken from others, as K. is described by secretaries, assistants, a former teacher, and a friend; but they are just glimpses, hard to pin down, and often contradictory. When K. himself speaks, we hear only *dreck*: " 'It's an expedient in terms of how not to destroy a situation which has been a long time gestating, or again how to break it up if it appears that the situation has changed during the gestation period,

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into one whose implications are not quite what they were at the beginning.' " Caught in moments of reflection, he is no more helpful, speaking vaguely of "an insurmountable obstacle," hurling himself "into the midst of it," and proceeding "mechanically." He has his "dream," composed of lyrical orange trees and a farm in the hills, but also with "a steady stream of strange aircraft which resemble kitchen implements, bread boards, cookie sheets, colanders . . . on their way to complete the bombing of Sidi-Madani." Finally the writer performs the act of an actual reporter on a California beach — he saves Kennedy from drowning. For once, "His flat black hat, his black cape, his sword are on the shore"; but the modern Ahab cannot strike through, for Kennedy "retains his mask." His ultimate words, on so crucial an occasion, are a simple " 'Thank you,' " even less than expressed to the waiters who brought him his lunch. "Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning" stands, intentionally, as a formalistic example of a world of *dreck*. The random juxtaposition of media accounts, documentaries, and personal reports — the raw materials of our own history — add up to nothing conclusive; they are the spatial reality of our age, but a new math is needed to interpret their meaning.

Knowing the world is, for Barthelme, ultimately an achievement of the imagination. His stories are formed on one level by the clever manipulation of words and phrases, and on another by the introduction of startling conceptions, both of which are then worked out in a deft parody of conventional structures. Barthelme's harshest critique of a fellow novelist, in a review for *Holiday* in April 1966, is that he is "tired," that "the feeling of terror Mr. [Graham] Greene could once produce from these materials has leaked away," and that "we are left with the manner." It is a case of "exhaustion at the deepest level, at the level of feeling." Barthelme does not exempt himself; his agent reported in *The New York Times Book Review* that his own "central obsession is not to be boring, because he is so easily bored himself." Barthelme's measure against boredom is a revitalization of material by imaginatively exploiting it within unlikely context. He dismisses old and irrelevant forms which no longer conform to the reality we experience, and by clever juxtaposition — of words, of conceptions, and lately of pictures for his collage stories — shocks us into an understanding of what is really going on. Barthelme's vignettes

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are not simply arguments in the dialectics of form, but are rather imaginative volcanoes, revitalizing our language, our conceptions, and our experience itself.

Barthelme's innovative techniques can be seen in other writing tending away from the mainstream: in W. S. Merwin's vignettes (which have joined Barthelme's in the pages of *The New Yorker*), and in Richard Brautigan's novels, particularly *Trout Fishing in America,* where by a similar method of unconventional juxtapositions the banal facts of America may be imaginatively transcended. An indication that such style may be winning larger acceptance was the selection of *Steps,* a novel by Jerzy Kosinski, for the 1968 National Book Award. *Steps* has as many short chapters as *Snow White* in even fewer pages; plot is replaced by more inventive associations; and its entire thrust is as an imaginative transcendence of otherwise documentary material. Moreover, Kosinski works from an aesthetic which turns away from the craft of such earlier modernists as James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov. These writers "stretched language into new forms," Kosinski notes in *Tijd van leven — tijd van kunst* (my translation). For modern, sophisticated times they offered "an explosion of words" to compensate for the sensory limitations of printed characters. Kosinski prefers instead to write the bare minimum, so that "the reader is forced to imagine what the novel merely suggests." He feels he can trust this minimal expression because he writes in an adopted language, with complete confidence that no subconscious motivations or traumas interfere with his artistic selection of words. "A writer who writes in an accepted language which he has learned as an adult," Kosinski concludes, "has in that language *one more curtain* that separates him from spontaneous [or otherwise uncontrolled] expression."

Kosinski's theme is the self versus society; but rather than lament the loss of self and accuse society for its repressive force, as mainstream modernists might, Kosinski explores the self's survival, and just how terrible its surviving power may be. His first novel, *The Painted Bird,* tells of a self surviving incredible and grotesque trials: a little boy from Warsaw is lost for six years in the war-torn countryside and is gruesomely brutalized by the backward peasants, who fear he is a Gypsy, a Jew, or a devil straight from hell. *The Painted Bird* is a ghastly involution of the picaresque novel and *bildungs-*

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roman, as the boy proceeds from one horror to another, experiencing an education to the darker side of life. It is his strategy of survival, however, that is the darkest element of the book. The most lyrical events in his young life are those of death: the panorama of a bombed building, the imposing stature of a Nazi officer dispatching "undesirables." If the lighter side of life should surface, such as in the boy's idyllic love for the pastoral Ewka, it is quickly blasted away by such sights as her forced copulation with a goat. To survive, he must plot revenge, and is ultimately satisfied when the barbarian Kalmuks ravage his village. "For a moment, as I looked at them," the boy admits, "I felt a great pride and satisfaction. After all, these proud horsemen were black-haired, black-eyed, and black-skinned," like himself. "They differed from the people of the village as night from day. The arrival of these dark Kalmuks drives the fair-haired village people almost insane with fear." There follows the most extravagant cruelty and horror in this already horror-filled book. Most of it was censored by the publishers of the first edition and is available only in the paperback reprint: men are not only slaughtered, but castrated in front of their wives and daughters, who are in turn forced to eat the bloody parts. Girls are gang-raped in all bizarre fashions, and the entire village is destroyed in a frenzy of hate. If there has been any doubt as to the reality of life, *The Painted Bird* resolves it on the side of darkness. The simple act of existence as one's self puts one at odds with society, and even one's fellows are safest when kept at bay.

The perils of the self continue through Kosinski's second novel, *Steps,* and its form expresses Kosinski's extended theme. In fewer than one hundred fifty pages we see over forty episodes in apparently random juxtaposition, but all eventually focused on "the protagonist," as Kosinski calls him, and his search "back through a particularly painful past for an age of innocence, for the self which, he feels, is waiting for discovery behind the blacked memories preceding his traumas." The strategy is an immersion "in the heart of the trauma itself." Both the protagonist's action and the author's method are indicated in the title of Kosinski's critical essay *The Art of the Self*: through many scenes rehearsed from his first three books — copulation with beasts, castration, the power of the collective, the cool revenge of homicide — Kosinski describes a hero exploring his

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own reality and ability to relate to others. But "to him the most meaningful and fulfilling gesture is negative: it is aimed against the collective and is a movement towards the solitude within which the self can display its reality." In the last pages of *Steps,* Kosinski transposes his hero to the United States where he lives an underground existence for a time, learning the structures of power in this new society.

Being There moves the action aboveground, to the very heights of public attention and importance. In this latter work Kosinski applies his theories of collectivity and self to the very contemporary American life where television, as he himself has said on TV, "makes us victims of a collective image which . . . engulfs us." His central figure for *Being There* is a person entirely defined by the medium. Named, as if by chance, Chance, he has spent his entire life secluded in a rich man's garden, his sole device of communication being a television set, which "created its own light, its own color, its own time." By changing channels, Chance finds, "he could change himself," and "thus he came to believe that it was he, Chance, and no one else, who made himself be." But Chance is the farthest thing from a personally-created self, the dominating creature we saw described in *Steps.* Rather he is an absolute blank, drawing his reality from forms he sees on TV. Hence he can serve as mirror to other dominating selves, and be universally appreciated. His genius is his total lack of substance; in conversation he can only repeat back parts of sentences, "a practice he had observed on TV," and speak in simple terms of his garden, which his imposing listeners take for metaphors of their own ideas. Because of the high connections of the people he accidentally meets, the peculiar mania of the American collective is allowed to take over. Chance is thrown up as a national figure, an "adviser to the President," and is lionized by the press, radio, and of course television.

Kosinski's theme radically departs from the conclusions of mainstream writers such as Bellow, Malamud, and Updike and critics, among them Wylie Sypher and Charles M. Fair, who lament the loss of the self. Instead Kosinski is joined by a new group of writers who stand in awe of the surviving self, whether that self be liberated by drugs (Hunter Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*), psychosis (Roman Polanski, *Repulsion*), or socio-political environ-

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ment (LeRoi Jones, *Tales*). In technique Kosinski and many of these other writers seize Barthelme's imaginative freedom to transcend historical limitations (in Kosinski's case, the matters of his own experience); but their redirection of theme is no less crucial to the course of fiction.

The disruption of American fiction is substantial: Barthelme's comic disabuse has made it uneasy for writers to write, or readers to read, in the insipid forms of the past; and Kosinski and others have discredited that noble theme, the loss of the self, which had fueled so many novels before. But the most complete disruption goes beyond theme or form: as practiced by such writers as Steve Katz (*The Exagggerations of Peter Prince*), Eugene Wildman (*Montezuma's Ball*), Gilbert Sorrentino (*Imaginative Qualities of Actual Things*), and of late by William H. Gass (*Willie Master's Lonesome Wife*), it questions the entire premise of traditional fiction. As Sukenick told interviewer Joe David Bellamy for the *Chicago Review:*

> One of the reasons people have lost faith in the novel is that they don't believe it tells the truth anymore, which is another way of saying that they don't believe in the conventions of the novel. They pick up a novel and they know it's make-believe. So, who needs it — go listen to the television news, right? Or read a biography. Okay, be more honest. Nobody is willing to suspend disbelief in that particular way anymore, including me. So once you get to the point where you admit that you are writing a book and it *is* a book, there really is no difference between fantasy and realistic action. It's completely continuous — it's all made up.

Raymond Federman, joining Sukenick and the other disruptionists in a search for viable forms of fiction, brings with him the authority of the modern French experience. He left France for America in 1947, the year Camus was both depicting Joseph Grand's novel-length effort to write a single opening sentence, and discovering how inadequate was any language at all: "The attempt to communicate had to be given up. This was true of those at least for whom silence was unbearable, and since the others could not find the truly expressive word, they resigned themselves to using the current coin of language, the commonplaces of plain narrative, of anecdote, and of their daily paper. So in these cases, too, even the sincerest grief had to make do with the set phrases of ordinary conversation." Federman will not settle for the set phrases or stock form

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of ordinary fiction: "The novel cannot truly pass for reality, the theatre is unable to create believable illusion, and the cinema, which essentially should communicate with the viewer simply through a series of moving images, must rely on sound or other devices to achieve its primary goal."

Unlike the French new novelists, who write at least in part from the philosophical imperative of phenomenology, Federman is closer to his fellow Americans — Sukenick, Barthelme, and even Richard Brautigan — who face the concretely social problem of an unreal reality and the irrelevancy of forms which depict it. Thematically, his novel *Double or Nothing* (1972) handles the now familiar story of adjusting to the incredible presence of contemporary American life. The solution, however, is in his technique, which foregoes the French approach of describing a phenomenologically real world in favor of making a reality more real: that of the book itself. His "real fictitious discourse" (the subtitle of *Double or Nothing*) is not a sham illusion of some other life but rather just what it says, so many words on so many pages, bound together as a book the reader holds. Federman's bet is a sure thing; of all possibilities, the book is certainly the most immediately real thing at hand, and from this point reader and author may together move in the positive direction from degree zero.

The writer who, through fictional persona or third person omniscience, makes a representation of the outside world has been degraded by the French novelists back to this zero point. To reestablish a fictional voice, Federman divides its role into thirds: a third person, the protagonist, whose life becomes the accumulation of historical data in the usual sense; but also a second and first — respectively the "inventor" who quite honestly creates these fake historical events, and the "recorder" who transcribes the inventor inventing. "Imagine the imagination imagining," as William H. Gass would say. Or look at these *three* things happening, which according to Federman together make a real story.

The story: a protagonist, occasionally named Boris, emigrates to America and is through great labor initiated into a strange new world, simultaneously with the inventor's creation of these "events" — a very immediate task, attended by concrete preparations for writing (so many days alone for work, so many boxes of noodles for food, so many squeezes of toothpaste), all watched over by the re-

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corder, who gives us the complete, eminently real fiction. As we learn from the preface (or, rather, from the "THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING"):

> this is then how it all started at the beginning just like that once upon a time two or three weeks ago with the first person record ing what the second person was doing as he planned the way he was going to lock himself for one year in a room to write the story of the third person all of them ready anxious to be to go to exist to invent to write to record to survive to become

Two hundred and two pages of concrete typescript, the book is its own becoming, and hence makes a claim to legitimacy. Federman is covered: no shoddy tricks or trumped-up illusions of reality, just so much writing. But as he redeems the method of fiction, he saves its substance, too. Granted that fiction is not history, but rather something made up; what then is more real, one phony "thing" the writer decides has "happened," or rather all the possibilities he *could* contrive, given his situation? When you read a conventional story, says Federman the recorder, "what you are really reading are the answers to unformulated questions" — the story of the protagonist. But the inventor is as real a part of the action, so the recorder must note the "questions" as well, "to give the questions as the substance of his fiction rather than give the answers." The bet is double or nothing, since "if the questions are given first on paper then the reader can formulate the answers in his mind." The full reality of the writer's fictional construct is effectively transcribed, and the reader is given the chance to receive a truly unexpurgated text. Federman weights the possibilities, shares them with the reader, and occasionally adds extra pages (p. 63, p. 63.0, etc.) to accommodate variations as he runs through Boris's life: such a novel can never die; another two hundred pages can be sustained anytime, if you wish to refigure on the basis of a dollar more or less a week for the room. "IMAGINE THAT!"

Phenomenologists, including Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and many critics of the French structuralists as well have regretted that we must deal with a second-order language, divorced from the thing signified but living only insomuch as it points back to that thing. System replaces essence, which can be bad if the latter is what one

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searches for. From his studies of Beckett, Federman knows that literature fails when it claims to represent the other, so in his own novel he simply lets it represent itself. As such it is a system, an aesthetic one, but by claiming to be nothing else it becomes a real entity. The novel's substance is more vital because it reflects man's imagination, instead of a secondhand lie about the world. The experience of life can of course be selected, shaped, and organized by art, and so may be best known; that was the battle fought over half a century ago by James and Wells. But once it is shaped by the imagination, the product is no longer life, nor even a sham illusory representation. It is simply itself — and that recognition may be as great an advance as were Henry James's principles of selection so many years ago.

To maintain a sense of life within the sense of art is fiction's greatest challenge, and it is by these terms that the achievement of Sukenick, Barthelme, Federman, and their contemporaries is best measured. Making a sensible shape of life was something Ronald Sukenick saw not only as a task for his own fiction, but as the obvious element in all literary art. Sukenick's fiction exploded the full range of outdated creativity, mere fantasy reactions to a world demanding a new approach, and reestablished a role for art which would not drive the life out of fiction. The true shock is not how far the new novels have gone, but rather how far we let the old novel desert the true ideals of artistic representation in favor of a wholly unreal documentation, which was satisfactory to neither reader nor writer and potentially destructive of the genre itself.

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GOING TO THE MOVIES

Jonathan Baumbach

MEDIUM AND MESSAGE

1. *State of Siege*

We have a large, unsatisfied hunger in our culture for fact, for the fashionably latest news, and the demand for it extends into fictional forms. When the food we get doesn't nourish, we tend to keep eating beyond need and hunger. So the culture keeps us hungry by feeding us too much of nothing. Pornographic films (the puritan's revenge on openness), Kung Fu epics, the latest genre exploitation. What it comes down to is a concern with subject matter as opposed to the thingness of a work, a concern incidentally with transience and death. Art engenders hostility, particularly in a mass form like movies, because it requires the participation of being open to it and because the news it has to offer has no recognizable urgency.

It is not surprising then that almost all of the discussions of Constantin Costa-Gavras's new political film, *State of Siege,* deal with the work's relationship to the thinly-disguised news underlying its fiction. The main issue of contention seems to be whether the movie is fair or not to Dan A. Mitrione, the real-life counterpart of the film's protagonist, Phillip Michael Santore (Yves Montand). Apart from a few breathy references to the director's crosscutting as if it were equivalent to the invention of the wheel, not much has been written about the film that acknowledges the medium. The political high-mindedness of *State of Siege* apparently brings with it exemption from aesthetic judgments.

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State of Siege is a didactic melodrama about the kidnapping, interrogation, and assassination of an American A.I.D. official, an agent in counterrevolutionary terrorism, by left-wing guerrillas in an unnamed Latin American country, based as the reviews dutifully report on an actual event in Uruguay. Like *Z,* it offers the liberal viewer the self-congratulatory satisfaction of shared outrage. There is hardly anything more satisfying than seeing one's paranoid fantasies of the secret fascist life of American foreign policy authoritatively documented in the film of an estimable and intelligent director. The combination of good news and good cause, especially when we knew it all the time, is hard to resist.

Whereas the much-admired *Z* was an ingratiatingly mediocre film with a hyped-up, borrowed style, *State of Siege* has, as if it were a virtue (like chastity), almost no style whatsoever. Journalistic impersonality gives Costa-Gavras's melodrama the simulated feel of authenticity. The film is fast moving (that vaunted crosscutting), its scenes, though talky, kept brief, to keep the viewer from losing interest while he gets the message. *State of Siege* patronizes both its subject and its audience in the manner of a classroom where teacher makes the lesson a game. Well, the lesson is the lesson or it's nothing. In trying to have it both ways, a kind of sugarcoating of the pill, Costa-Gavras undermines his film's ostensible seriousness. It is an aesthetic error, though apparently not a commercial one.

The casting of Yves Montand as the American A.I.D. official gives the role an attractive, though ultimately pointless, ambiguity. By virtue of the pained sensitivity of his face, its dignity and intelligence, Montand makes the "ugly American" of the film complexly sympathetic (and French), despite everything the film says about him. One never experiences Montand's Phillip Michael Santore as a man capable of the atrocities of which the guerrillas find him guilty, and so again Costa-Gavras has it both ways. The complexity *State of Siege* gains through Montand's ambivalent presence — what we experience carries infinitely more impact than what we are told — betrays the film's political statement.

We discover in the opening scene that Santore has been murdered, his body in the back of an abandoned Cadillac, so that what must involve us in the film is the process of what happens, how, and why it comes to pass. Since we get to know none of the characters

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beyond superficial identification (which is an aspect of the director's Brechtian intention) and the film is visually banal, *State of Siege* has only its dialectic and melodramatic pace to sustain our interest. As dialectician, Costa-Gavras is neither Brecht nor Godard. Symptomatic of the film's strategy is a scene where Santore's children get on a school bus and the camera pauses significantly on the "American School" sign on the window. *State of Siege* offers from time to time something to look at — its justification as a movie — but very little, really nothing, for the eye to see. Our interest in this movie is impersonal and ideological, a displacement of what really concerns us in the privacy of our lives.

2. *The Getaway*

Unlike *Stage of Siege,* Sam Peckinpah's *The Getaway* is a low-minded project, a heist-and-escape genre flick, punctuated with violent killings, and is in every way, except in terms of social usefulness, superior to the Costa-Gavras. The differences I'm talking about are not solely differences of technical skill. One director makes didactic films of admirable intention; the other, no matter how banal the project, films of personal vision. Like Hawkes and Ford before him, Peckinpah has learned to define himself within and against the limitations of conventional material. *The Getaway* is exciting not because of, or not alone because of, cinematic stunts (like the spectacular chase scenes in *Bullitt* and *The French Connection*), but primarily through economy and intensity of image.

The Getaway opens with a shot like a tableau of a deer in repose, just outside the walls of a prison. Like Bresson's *A Man Escaped* with which it shares, surprisingly, certain thematic preoccupations, the title of Peckinpah's film gives away the outcome. *The Getaway* is about the physical and spiritual process of getting free. In an extraordinary opening passage, Peckinpah details what it is for Doc McCoy (Steve McQueen) to be trapped in prison, unable to get a parole because he is being blackballed by a member of the parole board, Beynon, who wants something from him in exchange for his freedom. Doc capitulates, sending his wife Carol (Ali MacGraw) to tell Beynon that he'll accept his terms, exchanging one kind of imprisonment for another.

Doc's freedom is predicated on the robbing of a bank for Beynon

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(the bank managed by Beynon's brother — the authorities in this film are all notably corrupt), which puts him in further jeopardy. Doc, although a professional bank robber — it seems a curiously noble trade as McQueen performs it — is a decent man who believes in keeping his deals in an otherwise-Jacobean world of seemingly endless betrayals. The main body of the movie deals with Doc and Carol's flight toward the Mexican border, charged with a succession of narrow and violent escapes, reflective of the tension and distrust in their relationship. Doc, who has sent his wife to Beynon in exchange for his freedom (her sexual betrayal of him self-created), holds against her unforgivingly the very thing he has asked her by implication to do.

The turning point of *The Getaway* takes place in a barren landscape of burning garbage (Peckinpah's version of the fires of hell) where the McCoys, filthy and degraded, come to what seems the end of their partnership. Carol wants to separate, indicating that she is through putting up with blame and distrust. The scene is extremely brief — this is an action film after all — and underplayed. "It's not going to mean anything," Doc says, "unless we make it together." In the cramped space of an abandoned Volkswagen, Doc risks trusting Carol (puts his gun away), which is both a choice and a necessity. "I chose you, not him," she says. They walk out of hell with their arms around each other. Together, as a team — it is one of the metaphors of the film — the McCoys are magically potent. The dangers faced in a mythic landscape are one's private demons made manifest. The essential getaway for Doc and Carol, Peckinpah lets us know, is from self-imprisonment. External freedom follows as a matter of course. The McCoys' coordination as a team is in significant contrast to the deviousness and vicious self-concern of the other human transactions in the film.

This thematic sypnopsis does limited justice to the achievement of *The Getaway,* which has to do with cinema and not idea, but it does suggest, I hope, that Peckinpah is not the violence-obsessed, neo–Fascist primitive that a number of reviewers imagine him to be. A personal moral code, which is not without some complication, informs all of his work. His heroes are anarchists of necessity, renegades against the world, defining personal integrity in their resistance to corrupt and arbitrary authority.

The Getaway has a strong sense of the relationship between land-

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scape and event, between space and freedom, a visceral awareness of the oppression of closed spaces — squalid rooms, car interiors, jail cells. Except for an unsuccessfully lyric swimming scene near the beginning of the film, *The Getaway* is starkly and accurately observed, dense with the feel of things. Doc and Carol's entrapment in a garbage truck, to single out the film's most painful and brilliant scene, achieves a visual poetry in the concentration of its extraordinary detail. There are flaws in the movie, lapses of taste, as in the unrelentingly abrasive subplot, and a distractingly disconnected performance (as if her responses were dubbed) by Ali MacGraw, but they are minor. As with the undervalued and misunderstood *Straw Dogs,* one leaves *The Getaway* released and exhilarated, having escaped for the moment one's own prison, in touch (or is it illusion? — the illusion of an illusion) with one's own unexplored potentialities for sight.

It becomes clearer with each new film that Sam Peckinpah is the most instinctively cinematic director now working in American films. *Ride the High Country,* his second film, still seems to me his most fully realized and spacious work; the best of the later ones, *Straw Dogs* and *The Wild Bunch,* are more dazzling and more flawed. Peckinpah is not at a loss for an audience so he needs no special pleading. *The Getaway* is one of the few good films that an all-or-nothing, junk-driving-out-art distribution system hasn't caused to vanish after a brief first run. On the other hand, if my friends' reactions are indicative, an intellectual audience, its notions of film hopelessly and snobbishly circumscribed by literary criteria, is losing out on Peckinpah. Film pleasures being in short supply, I recommend another look.

3. *Four Nights of a Dreamer*

Although the great French filmmaker, Robert Bresson, deals essentially with inner motion as opposed to external action, like Peckinpah he is concerned with the spaces of imprisonment and escape. It's not so much that opposites attract as that they include each other at the deepest level. Unlike Peckinpah's, Bresson's cinema, with the possible exception of *Diary of a Country Priest* which appears like a moral imperative in most college film series, is virtually unknown to the casual filmgoer. His films are mostly unknown because they are almost nowhere to be seen. *Four Nights of a Dreamer,* his most re-

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cent film, had to wait more than a year after its appearance in the Lincoln Center Film Festival for its brief, unpublicized run in New York. The severity of Bresson's style has earned his films the reputation, depending on whom you read, of being exquisitely or pretentiously boring. In fact, in my sense of it, the opposite is true. There is hardly an uncharged moment in Bresson's meticulous and provocative *mise en scène.* My sense is that certain audiences experience Bresson as boring because his films, while appearing simple, demand so much of the eye. Boredom serves as a means of deflecting pressure.

In *Four Nights of a Dreamer,* it is as if Bresson's influence on Godard had filtered back to him in a kind of circular pollination. A comedy — which seems an unlikely move for the director of *Au Hasard, Balthazar* and *Mouchette* — adapted and updated from the Dostoevsky story "White Nights," *Four Nights of a Dreamer* is Bresson's most contemporary film in style and setting. It is also the austere filmmaker's most ungrudgingly beautiful and accessible work. So the new Bresson is a surprise and something of a disappointment to his admirers.

In the opening scene, the title character, Jacques, hitches a ride to the country, takes two chaste tumbles in the grass, then returns to Paris. A deadpan joke (like something out of a Jacques Tati movie), it establishes an aspect of the protagonist's character, indicating the limits he places on the occasional freedom he allows himself. It is for Bresson also a joke on himself, on the constraint and economy of his method. In making the dreamer also an artist, which may even be at the secret heart of the original story, Bresson uses the Dostoevsky tale as an occasion for a meta-cinematic fable.

When Jacques dissuades Marthe, a self-consciously melodramatic figure in black, from jumping into the Seine, he falls obsessively in love with her or, rather, with the idea of her. Significantly — it is what makes the witchy girl so attractive to Jacques — she is "in love" with someone else. Jacques's life is at its most intense in his romantic fantasies which, narrated into a tape recorder, he replays (narcissism within narcissism) while he paints pictures of expressionless women or lies dreamily on his cot. If Marthe becomes real for Jacques insofar as he incorporates her into his fantasy, he, at the same time, in telling her the story of his dream life, moves riskily into the real world.

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Whereas in the tragic films, Bresson's isolated, self-imprisoned figures (the curate, the pickpocket, Fontaine, Marie), seeking freedom, make contact at the last extreme with another, *Four Nights of a Dreamer* deals with the romantic charge of hopeless pursuit. Jacques loves Marthe — it is the nature of romantic love, of course — because he is doomed not to have her. The dreamer, committed to loss, pursues only illusory hopes. To make real contact, to love, is to lose the fantasy of loving, which is central to the dreamer's life, the romantic, really masturbatory stuff of his art. Although their romance is dependent on the blindness of mutual self-dramatization, Jacques's loss of Marthe, her rejection of him for her former lover, touches us somehow at the end. Throughout the body of the film, Bresson denies us the least of our illusions about his characters, distances us from them as if a glass door separated our feelings from theirs. Withheld from us unreasonably long, Jacques's pain and isolation — the price he pays for his dreaming — breaks through at the last, releasing us into brief recognition, and the film is over. Jacques retreats into old patterns of survival, does what we've seen him do a number of times before, but for a moment we see him with extraordinary clarity, recognize him as if he were transparent or luminous.

As in other Bresson films, space and objects have more energy and life in *Four Nights of a Dreamer* than the characters themselves. What one remembers of the film are images like encoded fragments of a dream. A beautiful glass-sided boat moving through a tunnel, Jacques's hands and feet isolated from his body, drops of rain on the outside of a window, Marthe's angular form in black cape and hood, the empty space after a character has gone, Marthe looking at her naked body in the mirror, Jacques lying on his bed in listless rapture listening to the replay of his fantasies. Things seem unique in a Bresson film as if we had opened our eyes to their thingness for the first time. *Four Nights of a Dreamer* is minor Bresson next to *Au Hasard, Balthazar, A Man Escaped,* and *Diary of a Country Priest.* Still, you are not likely to see a more beautiful film this year.

4. *Cries and Whispers*

We tend, the evidence suggests, to be blackmailed by visions of despair as if it would be a confession of shallowness not to admire what gives us pain. Ingmar Bergman's over-praised *Cries and*

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Whispers seems to me a case in point. This striking and often beautiful film is thinly conceived (no felt past is imagined for the four central women), enervated, visually static, full of Bergman's by now predictable and facile metaphysical stances and, not of least concern, painful to witness. A woman is dying in a morbidly elegant turn-of-the-century manor house; three others (two awful sisters and an earth-mother housekeeper) await her death. Bergman's newest is not so much a meditation on death, as some reviewers have reported, but — its obsessive concerns unrealized — about diverse states of soul, about grace through suffering.

After seeing *Cries and Whispers*, I read the short story–like screenplay of it that appeared last October in *The New Yorker*. Although exquisitely performed, *Cries and Whispers* is less satisfying as cinema than its scenario is as story. No filmmaker reads better on the page than Bergman and *Cries and Whispers* is particularly attractive as a written narrative. It is as if the movie version, faithful to the letter, violates by its very literalness the impulse and mystery of the author's conception.

Everything in *Cries and Whispers* is self-referring. It is Bergman's fantasy we witness, not his characters', though the film, which is realistically acted, pretends otherwise. On the page, we know that it's Bergman's obsession — he is telling the story in his own voice — but on screen, the author's unacknowledged presence intrudes irrelevantly on the action. The film's style is not a substitute for the narrative voice of the story. For the viewer it is, if one can imagine it, as if something that doesn't belong to the film is missing at the center. The more *Cries and Whispers* asks us to believe in what we see, the more false the surface of the film seems.

Each of the four main characters revisits the past in memory. The sisters, except for the saintly Agnes (Harriet Andersson), who is dying in anguish of cancer of the womb, have been corrupted, so the flashbacks reveal, by living corrupt lives—a piece of tautological psychology, though justified perhaps by the logic of a dream. The youngest sister, Maria (Liv Ullmann) is a coquette, vain and shallow, who has had a loveless affair with the family doctor attending her dying sister. Her two scenes with the doctor, one present, one fantasy or memory, essentially duplicate one another in what they convey, except that the reminiscence ends with a piece of melodramatic viol-

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ence. The episode in the present is used as an associational device to set off the flashback, or such is the impression the film gives in that both scenes seem gratuitous.

The oldest sister, Karin (Ingrid Thulin), her nature represented by grays and blacks — a bizarre and audaciously literal color symbolism adumbrates the experience of the film — is a woman impacted by hate. Her gruesome reminiscence, in which she inserts a piece of broken glass into her vagina then spreads the blood like feces across her face, is without justifying context and so vulgar and egregiously false. Rather than evoke a past for the women, the flashbacks have the effect of denying the characters a life outside the present action. This may have been what Bergman had in mind — in a dream past and present are one — though like much in the movie the intention survives as unassimilated idea.

The last memory scene, conjured after Agnes's death from her diary, of the four women dressed in white walking in the park adjoining the manor house, is undeniably affecting. *Cries and Whispers* ends with a joyous moment in Agnes's life — the grace within and beyond suffering — surrounded, as she puts it, by all the people she loves. And yet, beautiful as it is in its way, the scene seems insufficiently earned, hollow and schematic, a too easy resolution. *Cries and Whispers* moves between an attractive audacity and a monumental self-indulgence.

It has been said of Bergman with some justification that he is the favorite filmmaker of those who don't like movies. His films have more in common with "fine" literature, are more recognizable as art, than the cinema of his major contemporaries, which is not to say that he is not an artist. The problem is that Bergman has become a cultural event and his films occasions for churchgoing deference. *Cries and Whispers* is the kind of film that audiences in pursuit of culture can admire with their eyes closed, and maybe only that way. It offers a kind of masochistic pleasure for those who wish to confuse anguish with profundity. Robert Bresson, who also deals with matters of grace, who is the more profound and distinctive filmmaker, has never had an American audience queued around the block to see his films. There's no market in our culture for the real thing. When Bergman's masterpiece *Persona* opened here several years ago it got nothing like the admiring attention of the inferior *Cries and Whispers*.

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One further heresy. It may even be that the pains of viewing *Cries and Whispers* — suffering in a movie theater is not always redemptive — outweigh the pleasure. I suppose, given cultural priorities, if a work has the right ideas about despair and alienation, is tedious enough to pass for profound, and is what everyone is admiring, it can't hurt too much.

Chile 1970-1973

The only socialist government that was freely elected and attempted to maintain personal and intellectual freedom.

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ARGUMENTS

MARCUSE IN THE SEVENTIES

If the social theories of Herbert Marcuse had remained just theories they might have been conceded no higher status than that of a peripheral heresy in postwar American sociology and political science. But they came to transcend their original academic context and to inspire furious debate over the very nature of capitalist society, while their author became a bugbear of politicians and the mass media. Marcuse's elevation, from academic theorist to an exemplary intellectual of our time, occurred because he was identified as the most weighty apologist for a spectacular and disruptive political movement, the New Left. In fact, the partnership between Marcuse and his younger disciples has often been an uneasy one; yet there are sound historical reasons why they should be linked in comradeship — reasons worth specifying, since they are becoming less obvious as time passes.

The American New Left emerged in the early sixties in a few university centers, of which Berkeley and Madison were the most conspicuous. It represented a fusion of three impulses: disillusionment with the American Communist Party (this was also a generational shift, since a large proportion of the founding New Leftists were children of former Party members); disbelief in the chances for success of a social-democratic party in the U.S.; and admiration for the campaign of passive resistance to segregation then being waged by Southern blacks. Their strategy of direct, exemplary action had an immediate appeal that mobilized thousands of white students in support, but it embarked the New Left on a dubious course. Direct action made sense for Southern blacks, since they had no real alternative. In the North, however, it led many New Leftists to shun basic tasks of political organization, relying instead on media manipulation — a sword that could easily be turned against them — and on a "Jericho strategy" of marching with sound of trumpets around some offensive institution (the Pentagon, for example), in the hope that its walls might crumble.

By 1969 the limits of these strategies became evident, and the New Left lost its mass following as people silently echoed Dotson Rader's

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cry: "I ain't marching any more." About the same time, the right began to display its own brand of moral indignation — and to support it with far more substantial material and political forces than the left could muster. But before these setbacks direct action achieved considerable success, and it was then that Marcuse's ideas most influenced younger militants. His indictment of a monolithic and heartless "power structure," his exaltation of intellectuals as a political force, his dismissal of the working class as corrupt and complacent, and his polemics against official Communist parties: all these points seemed to be confirmed by the New Leftists' actual political experience. Marcuse's theses derived from an analysis of advanced capitalism now so familiar that it needs only brief exposition.

Though Marcuse still formally identifies himself as a Marxist, he argues that the classic nineteenth-century class struggle has now given way to the *integration* of the working class into a monolithic system of capitalist (or, in the East, bureaucratic) domination; from this it follows that "the search for specific historical agents of revolutionary change in the advanced capitalist countries is indeed meaningless." But the system can still be transformed, for continual progress in technology makes it more and more evident that exploitation and "surplus-repression," imposed by capitalism on those it rules, have no rational justification; thus, an intellectual gap opens between things as they are, and as they might be — if society were organized more rationally.

But how can the transition be made to a regime in which these utopian social prospects can be fulfilled? This is a notorious crux in Marcuse's system, given his past skepticism about the likelihood of the working class attempting to seize power. In his most recent work, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt,* this skepticism moderates into a grudging recognition that the working class — defined to include service workers and technicians — still must play a key role in any transformation of capitalist society. Marcuse therefore prescribes for the New Left an attitude toward the working class similar to that already adopted toward blacks: each group — intellectuals and workers — should work for similar ends, but independently. Some time in the future, he hopes, they may even speak the same language and engage in the same struggle. Whatever the flaws in this position, it is certainly more sensible than Marcuse's earlier speculations about the need for a "repressively tolerant" regime of right-thinking intellectuals who would clear the way for a socialist revolution by reshaping the consciousness of the masses into conformity with their own.

In all of this, Marcuse revives the tradition of utopian political thought that derived from the eighteenth-century *philosophes* and was

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elaborated by St. Simon, Fourier, and Owen. By the later nineteenth century, however, it had expired as an effective political force; Engels pronounced its obituary in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), a polemic which declared that utopianism, having made its historical contribution, had no further role in the development of socialist thought and action. Marcuse, however, has refused to accept the orthodox Marxist view of the obsolescence of utopian socialism; he argues that this tradition may now legitimately be rehabilitated because "utopian possibilities are inherent in the technical and technological forces of advanced capitalism and socialism." The weakness of this argument is simply its familiarity: a long series of speculative thinkers, from Owen and Jules Verne on to Wells and Huxley, have imagined the utopian potentialities of technology. Within this tradition, Marcuse seems anomalous; unlike its major representatives, he has never analyzed closely the actual practice of applied science, nor does he offer detailed proof of his assertions about its social effects. Rather, he invokes technology to lend substance to the ideal worlds of his imagination. The vocabulary used to describe these worlds is essentially moral, not functional, scientific, or visionary; its key terms — domination, repression, barbaric, humane, liberated, etc. — clearly distinguish Marcuse's speculations from those of technocrats like Herman Kahn or Jacques Ellul, social engineers like B. F. Skinner, or biomystics like Norman O. Brown.

A worthy descendant of Kant and Hegel, Marcuse has always tried to make his moral categories consistent with a kind of all-embracing social rationality: in his ideal future state there would prevail "a real union of duty and happiness." *Eros and Civilization,* certainly his boldest and most impressive work, is based on Marcuse's very characteristic refusal of Freud's dualism, his bleak insistence that culture must always remain the enemy of man's deepest self. It need no be so, Marcuse responds: our primitive, pleasure-seeking impulses *can* be reconciled with the demands of civilization, after we have transformed the capitalist Leviathan into a nonrepressive association of liberated individuals. (Marcuse made a similar argument as early as 1938, though without using Freudian categories: "On Hedonism," reprinted in *Negations.*) He thus balks at both Freud's notion of perpetual struggle between drive and repression, and Marx's belief in a similarly ineluctable struggle, under capitalism, between social classes. To such "hateful clash of contraries" Marcuse opposes the alternative of a grand mechanism of historical rationality, evolving in accordance with its own inner dynamic — a concept closer in spirit to the structural-functional social models of Weber and Parsons than to the essential radical tradition.

These criticisms apply only partially to *Counter-Revolution and*

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Revolt, which does not present a unified intellectual system and which descends to particulars (if not to nuances) more often than earlier works have done. The book contains three loosely-connected essays: one on the political situation in the U.S., one on "nature and revolution," and one on "art and revolution." They share a concern with the renewed aggressiveness of right-wing forces in American politics since 1968, a development that Marcuse calls a "counter-revolution" — a confusing term, since he simultaneously asserts that in the Western world "there is no recent revolution to be undone, and there is none in the offing." Against this background Marcuse sets the recent decline of the New Left, and suggests the means of its potential resurgence.

The third essay stands apart as a sketch for a theory of revolutionary art; little need be said of it since it will already be familiar to *P.R.* readers. The essay's main concern is the question: how may art acquire a revolutionary content, yet still preserve its traditional forms and its "alienation from established reality?" This is certainly an engrossing issue for the literary theorist, but a Marxist critic should first consider a more basic question: what are the social functions of the various "high" and "low" art forms today, i.e., what ideologies inform them, and what audiences are they directed to? But Marcuse's response to mass art, such as cinema, TV, or pop music, is generally one of aloof distaste; such an attitude precludes his offering a comprehensive view of the role of art in modern capitalist society. Even so meticulous a Weimar intellectual as Walter Benjamin saw the necessity of placing mass culture at center stage (in, for example, his seminal essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction").

There remains Marcuse's analysis of current U.S. politics, in which he reviews the conservative offensive and the response to it of the New Left, the ecology movement, and Women's Liberation. Here the style of exposition is too often spasmodic and oracular, whether in set-piece declarations of solidarity with Angela Davis and the Living Theater or in pronouncements unsupported by evidence or argument, such as "the murder of the Kennedys shows that even Liberals are not safe if they appears as too liberal. . . ." Beyond such mannerisms lies a more central, and typical, weakness in Marcuse's argument: he gives the enemy various names, yet never really defines him. In negation, he is precise: we are told, for example, that "the bourgeoisie is, in terms of its social function and spirit, *no longer* the *ruling class* today." But if we try to find out who has replaced it, we encounter only such terms as "the power structure," "the rulers," "the capitalist system," "politicians, general, and managers," and, most often, "the Establishment" (with a capital E). These are mere clichés of pop sociology, yet Marcuse is

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thrown back on them because of a characteristic dilemma: he wishes neither to apply traditional Marxist class terms, nor to concede that any genuine popular sovereignty exists in American society.

He does recognize that the New Left has suffered "defeat" since 1968 and must now regroup. How should this be done? The answer is again vague, consisting of a grab-bag of possible strategies that are not coherently related to each other. Some of the main suggestions are: that the New Left should purge itself of anti-intellectualism and "pubertarian revolt"; should develop "a new quality of life"; should abandon the hope of building a mass party and evade repression by decentralizing; should build a long-term base in the universities and other potentially hospitable institutions; should cultivate the "female" qualities of "tenderness, receptivity, sensuousness"; should fight against "the fetishism of the commodity world." Taken as a group, these proposals seem to me less a response to defeat than a ratification of it.

Marcuse's vagueness about "who rules America?" — which is in turn responsible for the vagueness of his suggested strategies for the left — may be circumvented by posing a related question that *can* be answered precisely: "who owns America?" We know, for example, that the richest 10 percent of family own 56 percent of American wealth, whereas the poorer 50 percent of the population has a negligible share (less than 5 percent), and the poorest 10 percent have *negative* wealth (i.e., their debts exceed their assets). These gross inequalities even understate the real concentration of economic power, because middle class wealth holders own mostly real estate or other assets that produce little income. Control of the means of production, and of the profits thereby generated, lies with the owners of corporate stocks; of these, 86 percent are held by the richest 5 percent of the population, and the richest 1 percent alone hold nearly two-thirds. (Figures in this paragraph are taken from "Who Has The Wealth In America?," *Business Week,* 1972.)

For reasons too complicated to detail here, progressive taxation is no more than an irritant to America's rich: their share of national wealth has not been reduced over the last two generations, and may even now be increasing. One would hardly expect any other outcome, since they control the machinery of government and have made it a means of preserving and advancing their interest. To attack thier management of the state for its wastefulness and "irrationality," as Marcuse does, is pointless, since they are in fact rationally and skillfully engaged in defending their own, rather than the general, welfare. The case against them therefore cannot be "rational" or "scientific" in any abstract or idealistic sense, for they can deploy equally "rational" arguments in favor of their privileges; this is precisely the function of the revival of

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Social Darwinism now being put forward by Professors Jensen, Shockley, and Banfield. (In mass culture, the same message appears in films like "The Godfather," "The French Connection," etc.).

If one is serious about changing the American system of government, or others like it, the first step must surely be to wrest control of the economic apparatus from its present owners, whether by revolutionary seizure of power or by gradually replacing private capitalism with state ownership. A powerful communist or social democratic party (as the case may be) would seem to be the indispensable agent of such a transition. Unfortunately, the American Communist movement has dwindled into small groupings of mutually hostile sects, nor have the recent electoral successes of social democratic parties in Germany, Australia, and elsewhere registered any impact on U.S. politics. The U.S. remains unique among industrialized countries in having no mass party of the left. Yet to build such a party here would be a monstrous task; one can understand the discouragement of so many radicals, and can hardly blame them for making a separate peace — so long as they recognize it as such, and refrain from claiming that the revolution will come about when everyone wears blue jeans and eats organic peanut butter. In any case, a truly egalitarian and liberated post-industrial society, if one is ever to be achieved, is far more likely to come in some technologically advanced but peripheral country than in the U.S. — a shambling dinosaur that lacks even a comprehensive system of social security or medical care. Meanwhile, Marcuse still tries to penetrate capitalism's sturdy carapace with the rapier of Hegelian rationality, and proclaims that "humanitarian and moral arguments . . . can and must become central social forces"; such accents, in this era of Watergate and the B-52, remind me of nothing so much as of Mr. Micawber's cheerful insistence that "something widely different from existing circumstances will shortly turn up."

Paul Delany

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BOOKS

GEORGE LICHTHEIM: 1912-1973

MARXISM: An Historical and Critical Study. By George Lichtheim. Praeger. $10.00.

MARXISM IN MODERN FRANCE. By George Lichtheim. Columbia University Press. $9.00.

FROM MARX TO HEGEL. By George Lichtheim. Herder and Herder. $7.95.

IMPERIALISM. By George Lichtheim. Praeger. $7.50.

LUKACS. By George Lichtheim. Viking. $5.75.

THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY AND OTHER ESSAYS. By George Lichtheim. Random House. $5.95.

THE ORIGINS OF SOCIALISM. By George Lichtheim. Praeger. $8.50.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SOCIALISM. By George Lichtheim. Praeger. $8.95.

EUROPE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. By George Lichtheim. Praeger. $12.95.

COLLECTED ESSAYS. By George Lichtheim. Viking. $15.00.

With George Lichtheim's sudden tragic death, one of the last of that vanishing breed, the man of letters, is gone, and this survey of his recent books turns into a memorial essay. As an intellectual committed to seeing life clearly, even if he did not see it whole, Lichtheim would have repudiated any tribute as sentimental. There is only one way to write about him justly: to appraise his work as though he were still alive, as though he could still read this essay and subject it to his skeptical examination.

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A free-lance scholar who rarely, ever more rarely, ventured from his lair in Hampstead, Lichtheim lived by his pen and published a great deal, probably more than he liked. There are passages, especially in his *Europe in the Twentieth Century,* in which his taut line of prose slackens, and indigestible lists take the place of his normally well-shaped sentences: "Major innovators such as Thomas Mann (1875–1955), Hermann Hesse (1877–1962), André Gide (1869–1951), Paul Valéry (1871–1945), Marcel Proust (1871–1922) and Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) made their debut before 1914, and indeed transmitted to the post-war generation something of the nineteenth-century culture which at its peak had produced Ibsen (1826–1906), Strindberg (1849–1912) and Chekhov (1860–1904)." That the chosen format, the textbook, compelled Lichtheim to compression is only a partial explanation of such a passage. The point Lichtheim is making is true and even important, but there are less infelicitous ways of conveying masses of information in a small space than simply to pile up names and dates. The sentence speaks of haste and of fatigue. In the same book Lichtheim could write of Freud that he had nailed "his colours to the mast of what came to be known as the Oedipus complex," a surrealist metaphor that in his better moments Lichtheim would have excised. For he was a trenchant, sometimes a brilliant stylist. Had he had more time, he would have committed fewer lapses; though, I must add, the good moments remained plentiful to the end.

Lichtheim, these lapses apart, had the felicity of a professional writer blessed with a good ear. He was one of those exceptional Germans who discover, and exploit, the expressive possibilities of the English language. But his style was by no means all manner; he knew what he was talking about. Lichtheim has been called a journalist, but the epithet applies to him in the sense that he wrote extensively for journals; few modern journalists know Hegel and Benjamin, Nietzsche and Freud, as intimately as he did. And his erudition was coupled with a vigorous pleasure in penetrating cant. He had nothing but contempt for the culture heroes of the right, and no patience with the cult figures of the left. He took great delight in announcing publicly that the emperor has no clothes. Unfortunately his age gave his mordant wit much exercise: the thrones of twentieth-century culture have been crowded with naked emperors. Some of the most memorable paragraphs in Lichtheim's writings are denunciations of poets and philosophers whom intellectual elites have been inclined to worship. Lukács, he writes in his little book on that much-admired Marxist aesthetician, "has worn many masks during his life, and he has performed acts of calculated deception, accommodation and self-abasement remarkable even by the stand-

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ards of his chosen environment." Eliot, he writes, abandoned in the 1930s

> the pro-Fascist inclination which in 1928 had induced him to indulge in fulsome adulation of the British Union of Fascists, only regretting "that a nationalist organization should have to go abroad for its name and symbol." The publication he edited since 1922, *The Criterion,* had much to say about the problem of reconciling the "aristocracy of culture" with the "demagogy of science," a topic which had already troubled Eliot's spiritual predecessor W. B. Yeats. Similarly, "the governors of the people" must be encouraged to sustain "the conviction of their right to govern." Who "the governors" were was never clearly spelled out, but they appear to have been envisioned as a hereditary caste. On the subject of Marxism, *The Criterion's* readers were informed that since Marx was a Jew, and since Jews had become "more and more openly the exploiters of the Western world today," Marx's revolutionary doctrine merely represented "the desire of the inferior to revenge themselves on the superior (as Nietzsche points out, characteristic of the Judaic psychology)." Against this background it is hardly surprising that throughout the 1930s *The Criterion* maintained a policy of complete silence about Hitler and what was going on in Germany.

This is strong stuff, especially in a book designed for a wide audience, but Lichtheim reserves his most withering words for Martin Heidegger, with whose irrationalist philosophy he comes briefly to grips, though mainly in passing, in a number of his essays. "Heidegger," Lichtheim curtly notes, "was by no means the only German philosopher who jumped down the sewers in 1933, but the enthusiasm he evinced at the sight of Hitler's cloaca had few parallels." All this has been said before, though not often, not enough, and not with such damaging felicity.

I am not disposed to gloss over the potential perils of such a combative stance. It is in the best tradition of polemical writing, and it provides that pleasant little thrill that watching a bullfight gives the aficionado. But aggression can kill appreciation. Eliot (to single out one of Lichtheim's targets) was after all more than a murky reactionary; he rescued poetry from the mire of sentimentality, swollen rhetoric, and false pathos, and, in the best sense of that word, helped to revolutionize modern literature. Lichtheim, of course, knew all this perfectly well. He explicitly disclaimed any party line and, as his essays on Simone Weil and Graham Greene show, he could muster considerable sympathy for writers whose view of life differed markedly from his own. Nor was he disposed to discount Eliot's grim diagnosis of our time as a wasteland; he simply did not want anyone to enjoy the misery, or to contribute to its intensification. He confessed that he was not at home in

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the world about which he wrote so wittily: "I trust that I have learned something from modern scholarship and from the literature of the past four decades," he wrote, "but my instinctive sympathies lie with the representative thinkers of the age that ended in 1914."

This glimpse of intellectual autobiography is suggestive rather than conclusive. The nineteenth century, after all, was enormously varied in its temper. But, fragmentary as this little confession may be, it places George Lichtheim and makes sense of his polemical animus. The representative thinkers of the nineteenth century, I would argue, were, in the largest sense of that word, liberals. They valued decency, enjoyed cultivation, had a healthy respect for reason. They believed in politics. They recognized its seamier side, but they expected that this bloodless struggle for place and power was less damaging to society, more humane and less destructive, than the posturing of crowned heroes or the glitter of imitation Caesars. Besides, they saw the play of politics as a device for solving, at least in part, the grievous problems that modern industrial civilization had thrown into the laps of the powerful. Even Marx, whose writings occupy so large a place in Lichtheim's mind and work, believed in politics. While he saw the machine of history in irresistible motion, impossible to stop and hard to deflect, he thought that intelligent and purposeful political action could speed and straighten its course and minimize the number of its victims. The nineteenth century had other thinkers, of course, apocalyptic visionaries and ruthless critics of political culture, but these — Carlyle and Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche — were not representative of their time. They found their public posthumously and, though they lived in the nineteenth century, they were properly twentieth-century thinkers.

Our century, like the nineteenth, is obviously far too complex to be summed up in a phrase or two. But the revulsion against nineteenth-century liberal rationalism is too pervasive to be denied. It is no longer fashionable to say that the cure for the defects of liberalism is more liberalism; if thoughtful persons in the nineteenth century were somewhat naive in seeking public remedies for private ills, we, their sad heirs, have become largely anomic in seeking private remedies for public ills. That is why Lichtheim was right to think of himself as essentially a nineteenth-century man: he too believed in politics, for he was, with all his tough-minded realism, a rationalist. And that is why he did not spare his invective with typical twentieth-century prophets like Heidegger, who have used their reason not merely to diagnose, but to celebrate, unreason. It was Lichtheim's personal tragedy, as it is all our tragedy,

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that in these years the appeal to reason and to politics has come to seem more and more unrealistic.

However complacent nineteenth-century liberalism may have been, it was not inclined to be overwhelmed by slogans. In contrast, far too many twentieth-century intellectuals are intoxicated by language; words have never been cheaper than they are today. Terrible words like *genocide* or *Fascism,* which bear such heavy burdens of human suffering, are today applied by instant commentators to inadequate reading programs for black pupils, or to the family in the Western world. It was against this kind of irresponsible thinking, this adoration of quick violent solutions and aversion to patient analysis, that Lichtheim directed his polemics and his scorn. He positively enjoyed reflection; he wrote in an essay on "The Politics of 1970":

> When heads of government take to writing letters to the press in an effort to persuade the uncommitted that they stand for disarmament (unlike the opposing side, which presumably favors all-around suicide), the political scientist is driven back upon higher ground. If he cannot find a fresh vantage point, his occupation vanishes, as does confidence in his ability to discern those elements in the situation that are hidden from statesmen and diplomatists. The question, in short, is whether in all this welter of public and private comment on the world situation, there is still room for what used to be known as theoretical thinking.

The theoretical thinking that Lichtheim thought so essential, lest his occupation vanish, was not exhausted by the literature of exposure and denunciation. During the last years of his life, Lichtheim produced a large and very respectable body of historical scholarship, most of it revolving around Socialist ideas and politics. In the space of a dozen years he published histories of Socialism and of Marxism, a book on Marxism in France, a book-length essay on Imperialism, a set of essays headed by a long rumination, "From Marx to Hegel." In this essay, as in his other work, the relation of theory and practice, thought and action, humanism and politics had the place of honor. There is much information in these books and little hope, deep scholarship and deep pessimism lightly worn. His best-known book, *Marxism,* first published in 1961 and revised four years later, is a compressed but comprehensive history of ideas and movements that begins with the "heritage" of Marx — German Idealism, philosophical radicalism, and early Socialism — examines the Marxist system, the rise of the International, Marx's late theory, the struggle for his mantle, and closes with "the dissolution of the Marxian system," all in four hundred pages. Yet the book is full

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of facts — facts that Lichtheim thinks pertinent to his judgments. He subtitled the book *An Historical and Critical Study,* suggesting that this was the only way he could think. He was both historian and critic, and thought the separation of these intellectual functions a betrayal of mind. Sympathetic as he was to humanist Socialism, and saddened as he was by its failure, his principal loyalty was to the truth he could tease out from the verbiage of politicians and the obfuscations of philosophers. His "standpoint," he told his readers at the beginning of his *Marxism,* represented "no commitment to anything save the critical method inherent in the exercise of rational thinking."

It was the decay of rational thinking that probably dismayed him most. While, as a historian, he left the future to itself, as a critic he had little faith in it. "The 'end of ideology,' " he once noted, "so often proclaimed as a fact by contemporary writers, has never in practice signified anything but the end of socialist ideology." And this end was, for Lichtheim, yet another symptom of the prospective death of humanist culture. In the concluding paragraph of his *Europe in the Twentieth Century,* he soberly warned that this demise was now in sight; mindless technological civilization was almost sure to triumph. This depressing conclusion was in large part the consequence of a great treason of the clerks. Far too few intellectuals were willing to range themselves with the critical philosophy of Kant, Hegel, and Marx, with the critical philosophy of the nineteenth century which proudly asserted that "theoretical reason carries its own practical, normative implications." Lichtheim was quick to concede that modern positivists regarded this philosophy as "sheer romanticism, a return to metaphysics," but he was happy to be called a romantic, even a metaphysician, by such opponents as these. For him, whatever the right name might be, it was all-important to persist in the belief that "it is the business of philosophy to bring reason into the world, including the world of the sciences." The greatest triumph that a science emancipated from philosophy had scored in our time was "in the nuclear domain," a triumph which only underscored its inherent limitations. "If practical reason is to come into its own, this trend will have to be reversed."

One need not wholly agree with Lichtheim's diagnosis, one need not fully share — as I do not — his aversion to positivism, to recognize the grandeur of his convictions and the depth of his despondency. Lichtheim, in the only way he knew how, by writing, did his utmost to reverse the trend he saw as so pernicious. It seems plain that in the end he came to believe that neither he, nor anyone else, could succeed in this vital and desperate task.

Peter Gay

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BALL FIVE

THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL. By Philip Roth. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $8.95.

All the environing elements of Philip Roth's new novel — the title itself, the red, white, and blue dust jacket, the comments he has made (when asked by a *Sports Illustrated* reporter why he had chosen baseball as a subject, he replied, "Because whaling's been done") — speak of a complex ambition, half-satiric and half-celebratory, even elegiac. It is an ambition rooted in a familiarity with the more inflated aspects of American literary ambition itself, and in a shrewd awareness (which in Roth's work can be a source of power, as well as of commercial viability) of the ways in which myth and fact, romance and reality tend to mingle in American consciousness.

From the first words of the prologue, "Call me Smitty," one is aware of Roth's strategy, which is to place his book in a direct line of "great American novels" after having disarmed them through mockery. His Ishmael is one Word Smith (the first of many such locutions, of which the most outrageous may be Gil Gamesh, a sensational rookie pitcher of Babylonian origins, although a first baseman named John "Base" Baal has a pretty good claim, too). Smith is an eighty-seven-year-old sportswriter who has a hitherto suppressed story to tell, that of the existence, death, and obliteration from memory of America's "other" major league, the Patriot League, which flourished until 1946.

But before he can begin the account, he (and Roth) has to confront his predecessors in the business of national myth-making. The prologue contains a long sequence in which Smith and a rather grossly caricatured Ernest Hemingway debate the question of who's king of the hill, and another in which "Nat" Hawthorne, Melville, and Mark Twain all have their great novels only half-humorously reduced to simplicities small enough for the ambitious Smith (or Roth) to proceed to overshadow them.

To overshadow them, that is to say, not as fictional works of art (Roth hasn't yet confused himself with Mailer), but in the flamboyance of their use as part of the American impulse toward hierarchies, size, superlatives, and "winners." The book has a motto from Frank Norris's *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*: ". . . the Great American Novel is not extinct like the Dodo, but mythical like the Hippogriff." The very canny perception here is that to wish to write the G.A.N. is to pursue a figment, that the very concept is an invention in the order of extra-literary appetite and aspiration. And so Roth sets out to make this con-

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cept an underlying subject of his book. *The Great American Novel* is satirically "about" what the G.A.N. ought to be about and ought to look like. It ought, for one thing, to have a large subject, amenable to myth-making on its own; hence baseball, for whaling's been taken.

The story Smith tells is a complicated, grotesque fable of our erstwhile national pastime and its service as a repository of national self-consciousness and self-congratulation and a source of metaphors for the "true" business of life. As old as the real major leagues (Roth makes references to the World Series somehow being played among all three pennant-winners), the Patriot League was composed of teams with such names as the Tri-City Tycoons, the Terra Incognita Rustlers, the Asylum Keepers, and the Ruppert Mundys (an appellation doubtless derived from the Ruppert Stadium of Roth's boyhood in New Jersey). This last team is at the center of the book, for it is the commandeering of its stadium for an embarkation camp by the U.S. government early in World War II that sets in motion a narrative whose major strand concerns the infiltration of the league by Russian agents, their exposure, and the subsequent dismantling of the league and even the renaming of the cities so monstrously tainted by anti-Americanism in the most American of all human activities.

It has to be said right off that this story is farfetched, and not in the triumphant literary way that reaches across impossible distances to bring back something imaginatively useful and right. No, it's farfetched like any fantasy that doesn't spring from deeply felt experience. More than that, its crude absurdity is a measure of Roth's inability to find a dramatic equivalent, a plot, for the authentic feelings he has had about baseball, feelings that he evidently wishes in this book to celebrate at the same time as he thrusts satirically against the seamier side of the whole enterprise of baseball as national myth: its perversion by greed, jingoism, bromidic morality.

But there is a more purely literary, or methodological, difficulty. A tale such as this, if it is to be the creation of a usable myth, or of a myth about myth-making, has to unfold within a counterworld, a mock universe in which what exists and takes place has all the plausibility, the specificity and detailed inevitability, of actual history, but with a grand indifference to history, which is, after all, *only* factual. In this respect *The Great American Novel* more closely resembles such recent sham epics as John Barth's *Giles Goatboy* or Nabokov's *Ada* than it does a more or less straightforward baseball novel like Mark Harris's *The Southpaw* or Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*.

Yet Roth, unlike Barth or Nabokov, isn't content (or strong enough)

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to fashion a pure fable, a *likely story* in which resemblances to life are wholly factitious and the invented life is entirely autonomous and artificial. Along with his fake beings and events he introduces real ones: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt; Judge Landis, the long-time commissioner of baseball; the Depression; World War II. The intention may be to set fact and myth, history and imagination, in a relationship whose outcome will be the reader's increased consciousness of the ways they mingle and may be confused with one another.

If this is so, there is something self-defeating in Roth's method, an aesthetically destructive principle deriving, the internal evidence suggests, from his hunger for Swift-like political commentary. There is a discontinuity, as there isn't in Swift, between his inventions and his opinions, between what he has imagined and what he thinks he knows about reality. The book's "real" elements, for all their sporadic presence, tend, like the intrusion of documentary film segments into fictional cinema or into plays, to undermine the creations, which come to feel coerced into being instead of freely imagined, dragooned for the purposes of political or social satire. The further result is that the historically factual elements seem to be present for the establishment of a convincingness, an authenticity that the fictional ones have been unable to achieve on their own.

(I don't mean to suggest that those historical beings and events aren't themselves made fictional in a sense by being incorporated into an invented narrative. But precisely because they are present in a story that itself pretends to be historical, to have "really" happened, a reader can't help putting them back outside the story, where things *really did happen*. And this is to the detriment of the fiction, which needs the power not of actuality but of imaginative truth.)

Yet this isn't all there is to say. If Roth's book doesn't work in its broadest outlines and procedures, its incidental (and at times more than incidental) qualities are deserving of much respect. When he is immersed in the self-contained world of baseball itself, having for the moment relinquished his attempt to force it into the service of his political tendentiousness, his writing often becomes relaxed, surehanded, evocative. He has written elsewhere of his youthful "infatuation" with the game, how it could move him to "ecstasy and tears" and how its "lore," its "cultural power . . . suspensefulness . . . heroics . . . language and mythic sense of itself" went to compose the "literature of my boyhood." At times the book takes on the nature of a return, through the strategies of formal literature, to that splendid state of enthusiasm for baseball as a naive realm of expressiveness.

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Like so many of us a generation ago (do we have successors?), Roth experienced baseball as a world apart, they way literature can be, a surrogate universe, the "escape" into which is neither irresponsible nor immature but life-giving. The true appeal of the game (as of any organized sport with a history; on its different level, of art, too) lies in its being determinable, self-validating, decisive, the creator of its own destiny. Its very "frivolity" is its strength and the principle of its capacity to regenerate us. Bertolt Brecht once wrote that art, in order to be serious, has to be frivolous, which is to say, activated by an impulse of play. At his best, Roth recognizes this, and at *its* best, his novel makes up a world, which is what play does.

His near encyclopedic knowledge of baseball is what keeps this world from being arbitrary or solipsistic. For readers with knowledge rivaling his, an absorbing if minor game is that of identifying his hidden references. There's no special pleasure in coming upon Babe Ruth or Ty Cobb (and in fact it causes irritation when they enter the novelistic legend with the verified magic of their real names). But there is satisfaction in discovering beneath their disguises Pistol Pete Reiser cracking up against a wall, Connie Mack breaking up his great A's teams of 1929–31, or Eddie Gaedel, all three-feet-seven of him, striding up to the plate.

Gaedel was a flagrant instance of baseball's commercial side, which is one of Roth's satiric targets. In pursuit of it he sets much of the action in 1943 — a time when the war had forced baseball to employ over- and underage personnel, as well as players unfit for the draft and scarcely more fit for the ballfield — and exaggerates the situation. In 1944 the Reds used a pitcher, Joe Nuxhall, who hadn't yet turned sixteen; Roth has a fourteen-year-old (and ninety-pound) shortstop. Eddie Gaedel had only one turn at bat before being banned; Roth's characters include two midgets who are important members of their teams.

A great deal of this aspect of the book is funny (although to name a rapacious club owner Frank Mazuma and his four sons Jack, Buck, Gelt, and Dinero isn't). There is a fine bit about a one-armed outfielder (modeled on the Browns' Pete Gray) who functions by transferring a fielded ball from his glove to his mouth and thence to his hand (the glove having been shaken off) but sometimes gets it stuck between his teeth. The disaster invariably occurs with the bases loaded, the result being "an inside-the-mouth grand slam home run." In another wonderful episode the Mundys play a team from an insane asylum, whose players suffer various traumas, conflicts, and mental lapses at the most critical

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moments. And in the vein of sharp-eyed but affectionate domestic satire in which Roth perhaps functions best there is a running commentary on baseball's obsession with records, from which I pluck this gem: the mark for "standing ovations in a pregame ceremony in regular season competition."

But the light hand tires and the heavy one takes over. The Russians have come, with names like Chichikov, Smerdyakov, Raskolnikov, and Stavrogin. In a tactical move somewhat similar to one employed in his previous novel, *The Breast* (where he attempted to disarm criticism by pointing out within the text his fable's debt to Kafka and others), Roth has his narrator include at the end a number of rejection letters the manuscript has received from publishers. A witty ploy, but it backfires, for among the letters is this one: "I am returning your manuscript. Several people here found portions of it entertaining, but by and large the book seemed to most of us to strain for its effects and to simplify for the sake of facile satiric comments the complex realities of American political and cultural life."

A bit harsh and stodgy, it's still a self-critique of rough accuracy.

Richard Gilman

POPULAR ANTHROPOLOGY

THE FOREST PEOPLE. By Colin M. Turnbull. Simon and Schuster. $7.95.

THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE. By Colin M. Turnbull. Simon and Schuster. $7.95.

THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN: A YAQUI WAY OF KNOWLEDGE. By Carlos Castaneda. California. $2.45.

A SEPARATE REALITY: FURTHER CONVERSATIONS WITH DON JUAN. By Carlos Castaneda. Simon and Schuster. $6.95.

JOURNEY TO IXTLAN: THE LESSONS OF DON JUAN. By Carlos Castaneda. Simon and Schuster. $6.95.

Colin Turnbull's *The Forest People* and *The Mountain People* and Carlos Castaneda's trilogy, *The Teachings of Don Juan, A Separate Reality,* and *Voyage to Ixtlan* are works of popular anthropology. "Popular anthropology" is a curious rubric. It refers to works which may be admired for their literary quality but which for the professional anthropologist are not to be taken too seriously. They are at best a sort of adventure story, an educated travelogue, a narrative at the edge of fic-

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tion. They are frequently belittled, and the most professionalized anthropologist will take an odd pride in not having read them. Indeed, "popular anthropology" is often a euphemism for "not very good anthropology." One would be tempted to dismiss this attitude as a reaction typical of academics who are jealous of the success — usually financial — of colleagues, were it not that academics are often genuinely embarrassed by the popular.

One reason for the embarrassment lies in the popular anthropologist's explicit use of the first person singular pronoun. Popular anthropology, in fact, can be distinguished from professional anthropology (at least in a working definition of the terms) by this insistence on the "I" of the anthropologist. Although such popular works as Turnbull's and Castaneda's purport to describe life among the pygmies of the Ituri forest of the Congo, life among the dehumanized Ik of the mountains of Uganda, or the teachings of a somewhat dubious Yaqui *brujo,* or sorcerer, from northern Mexico, they are really descriptions, incomplete to be sure, of the ethnographic experience itself. Professional anthropology, traditionally and somewhat naively, tries to evade the experience, to bracket off the "I," in order to arrive at an "objective account" of the "culture," the "social organization," the "religion" of the people under study. Insofar as it fails to acknowledge that the "I" can only be bracketed off for heuristic or rhetorical purposes, insofar as it fails to acknowledge that the "I" intrudes into even such impersonal phrases as "It is raining today," it remains a discipline in bad faith. Popular anthropology specifically retains the "I." The ethnographic experience remains, at least linguistically, personal. The author situates himself in the experience, but insofar as he provides an opaque center for the experience, he betrays the experience. Insofar as he refuses, as he must necessarily refuse, to reveal *himself* completely, he is incapable of fully revealing the experience. Both professional *and* popular works of anthropology are inevitably responses to the ethnographic experience. They are — and hence the embarrassment that is produced by the promiscuous use of the "I" in popular works — symptoms of the experience.

The ethnographic experience is, of course, always threatening to the anthropologist — and to a lesser extent to the reader — because it provokes him to question, sometimes with much more subtlety than he realizes, his most basic assumptions about the nature of reality. He is driven to find order and meaning in what often appears to be without order and meaning. (Some anthropologists are now talking about a cognitive imperative!) Whether consciously or unconsciously, the ethno-

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graphic experience is necessarily structured as a quest and is subject to the forms of the quest including the possibility, the necessity even, of temptation and revelation. It is this quest structure which may help to explain the anthropologist's — and his reader's — fascination with such phenomena as initiation rites, shamanistic voyages, the secret, vision quests, and ritual revelations. It is also this quest structure that inevitably distorts the reality which is that of everyday life and which is in fact the subject matter of anthropology. Life is not, except perhaps for the most romantic, a quest. Social and cultural life are not necessarily structured around the possibility of inner, deep, profound, "heavy" meaning. Such is the concern of the anthropologist, and again his reader, who are the offspring of a deeply disillusioned society "in quest" of more meaningful experience (provided, of course, that it is of easy access), the offspring of a society whose revolutionaries are disillusioned after a few ineffective gestures toward political change, whose mystics prefer the instant mysticisms of the drug experience to years of disciplined meditation, and whose neurotics prefer a weekend marathon to years on the couch, the primal scream to affective insight.

Colin Turnbull belongs to that old breed of English anthropologists, explorers, and travelers who live under the spell of the noble savage and the belief in a world in which the virtues delineated by Aristotle, Castiglione, and other philosophers are still very much alive. His quest is personal: the simple, loving life distant from the cold, alien and alienating, self-conscious and duplicitous life of industrial and postindustrial society. He argues:

> The smaller the society, the less emphasis there is on the formal system, and the more there is on inter-personal and inter-group relations, to which the system is subordinated. Security is seen in terms of these relationships and so is survival. The result, which appears so deceptively simple, is that hunters frequently display those characteristics which we find so admirable in man: kindness, generosity, consideration, affection, honesty, hospitality, compassion, charity, and others.

He adds somewhat apologetically:

> This sounds like a formidable list of virtues, and so it would be if they *were* virtues, but for the hunter they are not. For the hunter in his tiny, close-knit society, these are necessities for survival; without them society would collapse.

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This argument is logical, but, like so many logical arguments, it does not necessarily hold when applied to the realities of social life. Hunters — so ethnographic evidence demonstrates — do not necessarily share in all the virtues Turnbull lists. He was fortunate to find in the pygmies a people who held the values we cherish and he sought. It is indeed rare that a sailor finds his port, and Turnbull was one of the lucky ones. Still, if one reads *The Forest People* carefully, one discovers a disjunction between the pygmies as Turnbull characterizes them and the pygmies as they in fact behave. One need only consider how Turnbull's field assistant Kenge forced his sister Yambado to marry Taphu so that he, Kenge, could marry Taphu's sister Maliamo.

> One morning the village camp was awakened to the sound of terrified screaming from the house directly opposite mine, where Yambado was sleeping. I looked out my window and saw Kenge dragging his sister out of the hut by one arm, pulling her over the ground and shouting to the camp that she was no good and should be killed. He pointed to her breasts and said she had enough milk to feed a dozen children, why did she refuse to marry? Yambado was as strong as a buffalo, he continued, so why did she refuse to work? He then gave what he considered could be the only reason, which was extremely personal and uncomplimentary. Yambado tried to get to her feet to hit him, but every time she began struggling he simply thumped her on the back with his fist, still keeping a tight hold of her with his other hand.

Kenge was soon surrounded by other villagers who encouraged him. Kenge kicked Yambado. Yambado hit Kenge's leg. Kenge became so enraged that "by the time he had finished with Yambado she was a sorry sight, scratched and bleeding with one eye swollen." Finally after further beatings from her mother she agreed to marry Taphu, retracted once by covering herself with ashes, a sign of mourning, and was finally married. Turnbull refers to all of this as "a little coercion." Hopefully, he is being ironic.

I do not mean to disparage *The Forest People*. I want simply to call attention to the role of the quest in the interpretation and evaluation of the ethnographic experience. Written in 1961, *The Forest People* has already become a classic. It is a beautifully written, marvelously sensitive portrayal of a people little known, less because of their isolation than because, since Homer's time, they have been imprisoned within the mythic discourse of the Western world. Unlike many popular ethnographies, *The Forest People* gives the reader a feel for the people both

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as a collectivity and as individuals. He learns to love the forest, forgetting its dangers, as Turnbull did; he learns to side, with a smile, with the pygmies, who despite their "enslavement" to the villagers are in the end their own masters, for they alone know and love the forest that the villagers fear. The separation in myth and ritual between village and bush, between the civilized and the uncivilized, between culture and nature, characteristic of African villagers and played up by the structuralists is brought to life. The pygmies are marginal, and like all marginal peoples they become tricksters of a sort, jokesters who will suffer the ways of the village for a meal but who find their real sustenance, spiritual and other, in the forests they alone know.

Turnbull was prevented by political trouble in the northeastern Congo from returning to the Ituri forest, where he had hoped to complete his picture of pygmy life by studying the villagers. He chose, finally, to study another hunting group, the Teuso, in order to investigate, through comparison with the pygmies, some of the basic principles of social organization. He hoped to find the same virtues that he had found among the pygmies. He was sadly disillusioned.

> . . . I took it for granted that the Ik would possess these same qualities. It was a shock to find myself wrong on almost all counts. The Teuso were not the Teuso, they were the Ik; they were not hunters, they were farmers, their mountain villages were far from liveable, the food was uneatable because there was not any, and the people were as unfriendly, uncharitable, inhospitable and generally mean as any people can be.

The Ik were a people without love. Their society had collapsed. They had become an aggregate of selfish conniving individuals, ready to manipulate and even sacrifice one another in order to survive. They were — and presumably still are — a people starving to death.

The Mountain People reads like Kosinski's *Painted Bird*. It consists of a series of observations each more horrifying than the last. Parents hide food from their hungry children; they laugh as their babies plunge their hands into a fire; they lock up an innocent girl with the promise of returning with food and do not return until she has died and rotted beyond the point of even burying. Fathers prostitute their daughters. A blind man is trampled to death as he struggles toward a dead and putrifying hyena . . .

But unlike Kosinski, ever the braggadocio, who takes peculiar delight in the horrors, the lack of development and denouement, in his

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story, Turnbull is deeply upset by his experience with the Ik. *The Mountain People* reads also like a keen. Turnbull's response to the Ik is to render them figures in an allegory of modern man. There must be meaning after all. Such, I suppose, is demanded by the quest, especially the quest of a romantic looking for yet another savage paradise. The allegory is, of course, the weakest part of the book. It has been attacked by critics. It is too facile a response; it is too much the product of a society that asks for and extols easy answers. The Ik were once nomadic hunters who roamed the rich Kidepo valley. Now they are farmers confined to a barren wasteland between the Kenya-Uganda escarpment and Mount Morungole — confined in order to make room for a game preserve. There is no reason to see in the Ik an allegory for modern man. There is, if one bothers to think about it, no reason to find any meaning in the experience at all. Turnbull does not learn the lesson of his first experience with the Ik. He shakes hands, good-bye, with a starving old man who weighs no more than sixty pounds and discovers that he has accidentally lifted the man off the ground. The old man's grip weakens, and he fall back, laughing. He tells Turnbull that he hasn't eaten in three days, and he and his companion dissolve into laughter again.

I have written elsewhere that the laugh is the laugh of death, but I see now that that, too, is a facile answer. I would describe it now as one of the three laughs that Arsene tells Watt about in Beckett's novel — laughs that are, strictly speaking, not laughs but modes of ululation. It is not the bitter laugh, the ethical laugh, that laughs at what is not good; it is not the hollow laugh, the intellectual laugh, that laughs at what is not true; it is perhaps the mirthless laugh, "the dianoetic laugh, down the snout." "It is the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus,* the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting the highest joke, in a word, the laugh that laughs — silence please —at that which is unhappy." There is, you see, no revelation, and this comes especially hard to the seeker. Turnbull was surprised, shocked, and disappointed, when, with the pygmies, he discovered that their most sacred, secret instrument, the *malimo,* was not an extraordinary wooden trumpet but an ordinary piece of piping.

There is something dangerous in Turnbull's allegorical vision of the Ik. He argues that if the Ik did once possess the virtues that they are now lacking — and he finds evidence for this — then these virtues, kindness, generosity, consideration, affection, honesty, hospitality, compassion, charity, and love, are not "necessary" human qualities. They

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may well be basic to human society but not to man. Society itself may be a luxury. This vision could lead to a fascist interpretation. The fact is that the Ik are a living aggregate of human beings who have been dehumanized as have thousands of other human beings. They are a product of society, of humanity — the game preserve! — and not an exception to humanity. To argue that their lack of virtue is a sign that virtue does not necessarily originate in man is as fallacious as to argue, on the basis of observing the psychotic, that man is not necessarily possessed of reason. Both the Ik and the psychotic are products of a pathology, social or individual as the case may be. They are not necessarily without humanity. They have been deprived of their humanity. Turnbull has inadvertently turned the valid argument on its head. He has, in making the Ik an allegory for modern man, released modern man from the responsibility that is his.

It is difficult to write about the Castaneda trilogy, for one is never quite sure whether one is writing about what Castaneda has written or about what has been said by critics, devotees, and countless uncommitted readers. Since *The Teachings of Don Juan* was first published in 1968 by the University of California Press, Castaneda and his Indian mentor, Juan Matus, have become cult figures. The books, at first underground successes, are now on the best seller list. *The Teachings* sells at the rate of 16,000 copies a week. Castaneda's works have been extensively reviewed and translated. They have been parodied, by Calvin Tomkins in *The New Yorker,* by Donald Barthelme in *The New York Times Magazine.* Songs have been dedicated to "Carlos" by obscure folksingers in basement cafes on the Upper West Side. *Time* has put Castaneda on its cover and attempted to create a Traven-like mystique around him. Search parties of guru-hungry American youth comb the province of Sonora in search of don Juan, who as becomes a sorcerer, prefers total anonymity to the clowning anonymity of his apprentice's partial portraits. Doubt is cast on don Juan's very existence. Castaneda has been compared to James Macpherson and don Juan to Ossian. Critics who do not wish to commit themselves to another *Third Eye* spoof refer to the trilogy as a novel.

Castaneda's trilogy, soon to be a quartet, has entered the discourse of the American seventies. It suffers and will continue to suffer the fate of all texts that enter that discourse. It will be worked up, exploited, made into a movie, simplified beyond recognition — *Time* has already summed it up as "how a European rationalist was initiated into the practice of Indian sorcery" — driven into the ground, forgotten, and

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resurrected, not as a text but as a social phenomenon, by American cultural historians within the decade. Meanwhile the text that is Castaneda's will be lost.

To discuss the success of the trilogy is to lose sight of its subject matter: the intimate confrontation of two men of very different worlds. Despite Castaneda's embellishments — and there are undoubtedly many — it is certainly one of the most complete, and certainly the most dramatic, portrayals of such a meeting. The books are deceptively easy to read, for one is quickly lost in the colorful, sometimes sensational, often melodramatic descriptions of the sorcerer's other reality — Castaneda calls it "non-ordinary" — or in his tedious questioning of his mentor. The books should not be read, though, as an accurate description of Castaneda's apprenticeship, however accurate his reportage may be. They should be read as a response to a confrontation with a personality as strong and demanding as don Juan's.

Castaneda, an anthropology graduate student at U.C.L.A., sets out for the Southewest in the summer of 1960 to learn more about peyote. He tells us little about his life except that he had left home years before and was an expert in "getting around." He meets don Juan by accident in a bus depot and is spellbound. ". . . Never in my life had any human being stopped my momentum so swiftly and so definitely as don Juan did that afternoon," he comments, with customary hyperbole, on his first meeting with the man who is to absorb his life for at least the next twelve years. He is initiated into the world of the sorcerer, the man of knowledge. He learns to see, to stop the world, to be a warrior, to experience fear and something of the other enemies of the man of knowledge: clarity, power, and old age. He writes.

It sounds a little like the beginning of an epic, a spiritual adventure of the sort that Joseph Campbell writes about. Castaneda is chosen, fated, *cogido*. Unlike Turnbull, whose quest was from the start his own, Castaneda discovers his quest only after meeting with don Juan. It is dictated by the wily old man. He is tempted and then bullied, goaded, humiliated, derided, and cajoled. He is insulted. Don Juan asks him if he thinks they are equals. He says yes. Don Juan replies, "I am a hunter and a warrior, and you are a pimp." He is marched through burning deserts, made to run up and down steep mountains, ordered to perform apparently futile tasks such as trying to dig up a stump in total darkness — one is reminded of Milarepa's master forcing him to build and then destroy a hut again and again. He spends scary nights in the chaparral, near mountain lions, in contorted positions. He is made to

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stare at a patch of fog for hours, to sew up the mouth and eyes of a lizard and let it go, to listen without thinking verbally, to take peyote, datura, and mushrooms of the genus *Psylocebe* which sicken and terrify him. He is told one thing one moment and another, quite contradictory, the next. His visions are treated with respect and then ridiculed. He is the butt of humor, of practical joke. He is tricked into becoming a sorcerer as don Juan was tricked. "I've told you already," don Juan tells him at one point, "only a crackpot would undertake the task of becoming a man of knowledge. A sober-headed man has to be tricked into doing it."

There is an element of the clown, the trickster, in don Juan and especially in his Mazatec friend don Genaro. Don Juan takes Castaneda to visit don Genaro in central Mexico. They spend several days collecting plants. Castaneda is encouraged to talk to the plants; he feels stupid. At one point — don Juan is telling don Genaro that his apprentice has seen "the lights of death" — don Genaro rolls on the floor in laughter and then, suddenly, stands on his head without the use of his hands, his legs crossed comically above him. A few minutes later — they are still talking about death — don Genaro widens his nostrils to twice their normal size in imitation of Castaneda, whose nostrils evidently dilate slightly when he takes notes. "What was most comical about his clowning was not so much his gestures as his own reactions to them," Castaneda says. "After he enlarged his nostrils he tumbled down, laughing, and worked his body again into the same strange, sitting-on-his-head, upsidedown posture." The clowning eventually disorients Castaneda to the point that he is on the verge of seeing, of experiencing a sort of fleeting Heraclitean-Bergsonian world that resists description. He watches don Genaro perform impossible, acrobatic feats over a waterfall, make the earth rumble, and later cause his locked car to disappear.

Tricksters and clowns — Jung noticed this — resemble shamans and sorcerers. The *istrioni*, the histrions, of the commedia dell'arte, Beltrame da Milano tells us, were often considered *stregoni,* sorcerers. They are perennial outsiders. Don Juan states: "I personally like the ultimate freedom of being unknown. No one knows me with steadfast certainty." They are dangerous. They are entertainers, tempters, seducers. (There is something of this in the role the pygmies play for the villagers.) In the West the clown leads us to question decorum and conventions; don Juan and don Genaro — they are professional metaphysicians — play with reality itself. They force Castaneda to question his ontology, his world view, to experience (the fear of) chaos. They offer him another

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reality to replace the unidimensional one which he, vain and foolish in his acceptance, takes to be real. In *their* reality, a second one, in constant play, I suppose, with everyday reality, mystery and contradiction prevail under the devilish smile of the clown. Their humor — the occasion for their laughter — is oriented differently from Castaneda's, from our own. It is in consequence forceful, manipulative, disconcerting and suggestive, illusionistic. It is the humor that derives from the loneliest vision, and it is when Castaneda finally grasps this loneliness — the loneliness of his teacher and now, despite his writings, despite the game he is playing with his personal history, his own inevitable loneliness — that he sees. "I *saw* the loneliness of man," he writes at the end of *Journey to Ixtlan,* "as a gigantic wave which had been frozen in front of me, held back by the invisible wall of metaphor."

One is tempted to write off Castaneda as a sort of ethnomasochist. He is certainly dependent on don Juan. He does not have the distance to appreciate, or even acknowlege, the element of joke in his predicament, and this is particularly apparent in *A Separate Reality* and in the *Journey to Ixtlan.* The apprenticeship has had effect, though: he admits to *presunción* and seems more at ease with his vulnerability. His dependency in any event is typical of all initiations, and the end of initiation is often, though not always, the regaining — or the developing — of independence. It is this independence, I suppose, that don Juan calls being a warrior.

> "One needs the mood of a warrior for every single act," he said. "Otherwise one becomes distorted and ugly. There is no power in a life that lacks this mood. Look at yourself. Everything offends and upsets you. You whine and complain and feel that everyone is making you dance to their tune. You are a leaf at the mercy of the wind. There is no power in your life. What an ugly feeling that must be!"

Castaneda has in fact formed such a strong attachment to don Juan that we have no idea how don Juan experienced his relationship with Castaneda. Indeed Castaneda seems afraid of learning too much about his teacher. "I did not want don Juan to tell me about himself. He paused as if he had read my mind." Don Juan was about to tell him where he had left his "passion." Was don Juan's role as a guide sufficient to insulate him from the emotions of a friendship of twelve years? We know don Juan only as Castaneda does — not in fact, of course, but in the retrospective consciousness of the storyteller. He seems

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at times as mechanical and aloof as any classic transference figure, and ultimately we know as little about him as we would of a psychoanalyst from one of his patients.

For don Juan reality, the world we know, is only a description "pounded" into us from the moment we are born and reconfirmed by language, by internal talk. "Whenever we finish talking to ourselves," he tells Castaneda, "the world is always as it should be. We renew it, we rekindle it with life . . ." Here is the paradox in Castaneda's enterprise. Were he to accept the sorcerer's world, to meet his ally — at the end of the *Voyage* he has still failed to meet him — he would not write about it. Writing reconfirms the world of his childhood, the world of the Westerner, the anthropologist. It is compulsive. The trilogy leads to the quartet. (He once told me that the *Voyage* was to be his last book on the subject.) It is a sort of compromise formation — an attempt to mask the fact that he cannot live in two worlds, except, perhaps, as a clown. And now he is playing the clown, the trickster, for the American public, but there is something inauthentic, something desperate, about his act. Maybe it is just that he has failed to meet his ally. He does not seem to appreciate, or even acknowledge, at least in his writings, the element of joke in his predicament. His sense of the melodramatic interferes. He has forgotten that the trickster often falls dupe to his own tricks.

Castaneda, like Turnbull, has been duped by the idiom of his age. Turnbull's allegory is a succumbing to a facile politics; Castaneda's reportage to the "heavy" mysticism of the young drop-out. There is something too simple about it all. There is a lack of courage, of strength of vision. Castaneda and Turnbull have in a sense betrayed their quest and the people, or teachings, about which they write. They have lost the element of mystery that is essential to the quest — and to the temptation — if not to the ethnographic experience. Both have yielded to an idiom of simple answers, easy constructions, indulgent interpretations, and magical solutions, and this probably explains in part the wild popularity of Castaneda's books. But Castaneda has gone even further. He has cheapened the quest and the teachings, himself and don Juan through his odd dalliance with the media and his coy playing with his persona. He has surrendered himself and his text to their public reading. He has not passed the test of the warrior. Like Turnbull he has failed to listen truly to the laugh.

At the end of the *Voyage* don Juan and don Genaro lead Castaneda to the edge of a plain to meet his ally. "If you don't feel that

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this is your time yet, don't keep your appointment," don Juan says. One can hear the hesitation of the old sorcerer who has perhaps experienced too much of his apprentice. "Nothing is gained by forcing the issue. If you want to survive you must be crystal clear and deadly sure of yourself." Don Juan walks away without looking back. Don Genaro — always the clown — turns a couple of times and urges him forward with a wink and a movement of the head. Castaneda waits until they disappear and then walks off to his car. Courage is not to be found in the confession but in the act.

Vincent Crapanzano

WHAT IRONY UNRAVELS

SADNESS. By Donald Barthelme. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.95.

> He knows the deaths of the heart, Hogo does. And he knows the terror of aloneness, and the rot of propinquity, and the absence of grace.
> — *Snow White*

Because it returns to familiar topics in the same perplexed voice, Donald Barthelme's *Sadness* will undoubtedly strike some readers as the "rationalized art" he attacked in *City Life* (1970), Barthelmian fiction that in its fifth volume has become thoroughly barthelmiated. But then artistic failure has always been a lively subject for Barthelme, who has carved out a successful career confessing his literary incompetence, and in *Sadness* it serves him again — only here the wit that in previous work enabled him to make his failures brilliant becomes itself the subject. *Sadness* brings to a close the experimental quest begun in *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1964) and the novella, *Snow White* (1967). The laconic style and abrupt forms Barthelme subsequently perfected in *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts* (1968) and *City Life* constitute the mode of *Sadness,* an approach that still works extraordinarily well in certain stories, "The Rise of Capitalism" and "The Catechist," but which is decidedly strained in others, notably "A City of Churches" and "Subpoena." Not surprisingly, the decadence of Barthelme's mode

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is a dominant theme in the book. "Some things appear to be wonders in the beginning, but when you become familiar with them, are not wonderful at all," he writes in "The Flight of Pigeons from the Palace." "Sometimes a seventy-five-foot highly paid cacodemon will raise only the tiniest *frisson*. Some of us have even thought of folding the show — closing it down." Yet Barthelme's reputation does not rest on the performance of his cacodemons. In the mock-treatise, "On Angels," in *City Life,* God's death throws all the angels into a constant alarm of questioning: what are angels, what is their function, what can they now adore? They become, in brief, ironic angels whose sudden self–consciousness leads them directly to the idea of suicide. In his treatise on irony in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," Paul De Man, using as his text Baudelaire's *De l'essence du rire,* applies the same rule to fallen writers. "The moment the innocence or authenticity of our sense of being in the world is put into question," he observes, "a far from harmless process gets underway. It may start as a casual bit of play with a stray loose end of the fabric, but before long the entire texture of the self is unraveled and comes apart. The whole process happens at an unsettling speed. Irony possesses an inherent tendency to gain momentum and not to stop until it has run its full course; from the small and apparently innocuous exposure of a small self-deception it soon reaches the dimensions of the Absolute." The only angels who preserve their angelic equanimity in Barthelme's treatise are the schizophrenics Joseph Lyons describes in *The Psychology of Angels.* The authentic angels are lost in their inauthenticity, caught in the "full course" of their questions.

It is precisely this momentum that has swept Barthelme from *Dr. Caligari* through *City Life* to *Sadness* and at the same time kept him the most pure of contemporary satirists. What sustains his artistry in *Sadness* is the very thing the book so elaborately protests: a sharp-toothed awareness of the false, his steadfast inability to put his faith in bad faith. Barthelme's artistic critique of ideological critiques of *la vie quotidienne* in *Sadness* is itself ultimately subverted by the relentless movement of his ironic thought, a situation that creates at once the book's confusion of perspectives and its paradoxical integrity. The sadness of *Sadness* is not that of a writer who has run out of "new wonders," whose illustrations have begun to crowd his text, but rather the ironically modulated sadness of the ironist whose ironic mode, having worked all too well, has become the method of his confinement. In much of its fiction, the book circles back to "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" in *City Life,* to Jane's letter to Mr. Quistgaard in *Snow White,* Barthelme's terse avow-

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als of the consuming power of irony, but with this difference — in *Sadness* it is the self, the ironic genius, who suffers the withering scrutiny. *Sadness* is a reckoning of the writer's ironic consciousness, that continuous "long sentence" briefly manifest in *City Life* as "The Sentence" thinking itself discursively "down the page," always present in tense, stuck fast to the quotidian, articulating its knowledge even though attention may be directed elsewhere. Burdened with its own "festering consciousness," the grammar of its existence, and moving inexorably toward its conclusive (but not yet bestowed) period, this comprehensive sentence finally swerves out of the text in *City Life,* but its discourse remains the organizing principle in Barthelme's fiction, the self-reflexive line that connects the fiction in his books and the books themselves within a coalescing narrative. But before we come to *Sadness* itself and the dubious *modus vivendi* fashioned in its final piece, "Daumier," it is first necessary to consider the achievement of that complex *I* disclosing the Barthelmian sentence, the great artist of "The Genius" to whom the Mayor and City Council of Houston send their homage: a field of stainless steel tulips.

Since *Dr. Caligari* Barthelme has dealt almost obsessively with two related themes: the rigorous life of confusion led by the modern writer (who is intensely aware of what he and others do not know) and the "brain damage" that blankets his world, covering every aspect of contemporary life "like an unbreakable lease." These are well-trodden themes in modern literature, but Barthelme has always boldly met their banality with the pertinent cliché, conceded his part in the problem and therein avoided lectures and allegories. Writing as one casualty to another, keeping to the known (the war in Vietnam manifest in New York: *vide* "The Indian Uprising" in *Unspeakable Practices*) and the commonplace (domestic crises, itineraries, official functions, and private parties) he has instead, often with Kafkaesque intensity, restated the questions these themes beg. How does the artist represent this brain-damaged world? And how does he survive in it, endure his own damaged consciousness, the "run-mad skimble-skamble of information sickness" vividly portrayed in *City Life,* without the recourse of madness, Dr. Caligari's fate? In "The Dolt," which appears in *Unspeakable Practices,* a hopelessly blocked writer strives to write a coherent linear narrative and miserably fails, confounded at last by the arrival of an immense son wearing a serape woven of transistor radios each tuned to a different station. A jangling serape that in its texture is not unlike "The Indian Uprising" where "strings of language," shafts of diverse discourse, are

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also intertwined "into a rushing, ribald whole." Barthelme's forms are typically fragmented — collages, soliloquies that move in spasms from cerebral interrogations to whimsical fantasies — and within these forms, with the assiduity of the pop artists, he has consistently posed the primary products of the "trash phenomenon," a wide array of frozen language. Thick slices of technological jargon cut from professional journals are wedged in his text between literary allusions and the *blague* of post–Freudian introspection, discourse that masturbates the jaded ego with promises of significance. The language of the Seven Dwarfs in *Snow White* is all replication: "It means that the 'not-with' is experienced as more pressing, more real, than the 'being-with.' It means she seeks a new lover."

Yet the pop artist's consent to the ravishment of modern society, his avid reproduction of its commodities and creation of para-assembly lines (Andy Warhol's Factory), is a measure adamantly refused in Barthelme's fiction. The propositions are nonetheless made. One of the dwarfs in *Snow White,* noting the per capita production of trash in the United States, predicts its ultimate totality: "Now at such a point, you will agree, the question turns from a question of disposing of this 'trash' to a question of appreciating its qualities, because, after all, it's one hundred percent, right?" And in *City Life* the question is whether the blue electrical flowers should be plugged in, whether the ersatz world we have created should be inhabited without the regrets of the humanist. The skillfully drawn dystopia in *City Life,* "Paraguay," sardonically undercuts these propositions. A carefully programmed totalitarian society, Paraguay solves its problems by gently and persuasively killing the human spirit. Repressively tolerant, maniacally progressive, it is a paradise not only for the technician but also for the pop artist: "New artists have been obtained. These do not object to, and indeed argue enthusiastically for, the rationalization process. Production is up. Quality-control devices have been installed at those points where the interests of artists and audience intersect. Shipping and distribution have been improved out of all recognition. . . . The rationalized art is dispatched from central art dumps to regional art dumps, and from there into the lifestreams of cities. Each citizen is given as much as his system can tolerate." The artist indeed has become a technician. What Paraguay seeks, above all, is an efficient homogeneity. Barthelme has the same good ear for brutalized language that Swift had, who also savaged the social scientists and pure researchers in their own extravagant terms. Yet if "Paraguay" belongs to the tradition of the satiric travel narrative,

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here there is no contrasted utopian El Dorado, no place except Paraguay. And when it comes time to leave, problems present themselves. How does one get out of this fiction? Survival in the Warholian manner, rationalized and minimized, is not an alternative seriously considered in *City Life,* but the way out of Paraguay, the refusal, is difficult. The plan finally produced is a "number of analyses of Brownian motion equipped, at each end, with alligator clips." In brief, no plan at all. Barthelme's image of the city is that of a container of teeming molecules, each existence on its own random (and absurd) trajectory, the city as confined chaos. At the end of *City Life* one of his characters revises the image but not the meaning: the city is a "multi-directional muck" reflecting "that muck of mucks, human consciousness."

Barthelme's response to this Paraguayan existence, to brain-damaged life, has not always been as strenuous as it is in *City Life.* In the earlier fiction, notably *Dr. Caligari,* he exorcises horrors with comic hyperbole, turning a visit to the "Akron slums" in "Up, Aloft in the Air" into an amusing skit. Peterson, the minor artist who is the reluctant hero of "A Shower of Gold," decides finally to live wholly in the imagination. He refuses to participate in an Orwellian TV program, "Who Am I?" which bombards contestants with ruthless Kierkegaardian queries, and instead resorts to the subversion of fantasy, creating other selves, inventing experiences. Yet in *Snow White* it is Barthelme who directs Kierkegaardian irony on those who seek such fanciful diversions. The figure of Peterson reappears as the deluded princelike Paul, a doomed character who keeps trying to take himself out of it and who finally succeeds by mistakenly drinking the poison intended for Snow White. It is in *Snow White* that the deceit and squalor of modern existence is kept relentlessly before the reader's view, that Barthelmian irony, peeling away the distortions of jargon, the tireless circumlocutions of post-baccalaureate introspection, continually presents the singular dread Hogo de Bergerac alone clearly sees: "the terror of aloneness . . . the rot of propinquity, and the absence of grace." Jane's letter to the petit bourgeois Quistgaard in *Snow White* speaks directly to this issue. The intrusion of awareness into a contented plenum, an integrated universe of discourse, destroys that "u. of d." but does not replace it. "Negative thinkers," Kierkegaard writes in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* "always have one advantage, in that they have something positive, being aware of the negative element in existence; the positive have nothing at all, since they are deceived." In *Snow White* that advantage is a cold comfort.

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Kierkegaard and Kafka are important sources in Barthelme's work: Kafka for his unerring grasp of the non sequitur, the deadpan tone of the alienated man obstinately looking for his recourse, Kierkegaard for the knowledge that Kafka's art is a dead end, the mode an agonizing exercise in futility. In "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" Kierkegaard is not only unfair to Schlegel, he is unfair to art itself, certainly to flinching artists like Peterson. Art transforms and mitigates the deep pain of existence, Barthelme writes, quoting Kierkegaard, whereas what is wanted "is not a victory over the world but a reconciliation with the world," an event to be obtained only by the imposition of grace. It is in this particular fiction that Barthelme reaches a difficult pass in his writing, the point where contrary directions coincide. "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" takes as its modest *donneé* the writer's ironic annihilation of an uncomfortable situation — he witnesses the plethora of games in a friend's house, games signifying in their number and variety the desperate absence of authentic recreation — and then proceeds to a Kierkegaardian examination of ironic language. What is felt by the ironist is the exhilarating power of negating the object, his freedom, and yet, as Kierkegaard then notes, the victory is over nothing. Like Jane in *Snow White,* the ironist presides over a destroyed space. Similarly the artist who transforms the imperfect world (as Barthelme transforms Akron in "Up, Aloft in the Air") triumphs over that world only by turning from it. At this point in Kierkegaard's argument the writer becomes energetic in his defense of Schlegel, but he is trapped in ironic language, becoming himself an object of irony, a fictive self who shortly betrays himself in an anecdote about the tribulations of Louis Pasteur; Pasteur who genuinely believed in the value of science, who could genuinely weep at the opportunity to continue his research.

De Man's description of this paradoxical state in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" would seem to refer as well to Kierkegaard as to Baudelaire. Ironic language, he remarks, "splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. This does not, however, make it into an authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic." That split between the writer who falls within the text and the writer of the text is graphically displayed in the story. A black square occurs in the midst of the writer's confession which concludes: "Because that is not what I think at all. We have to do here with my own irony. Because of course Kierkegaard was 'fair' to Schlegel. In making a state-

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ment to the contrary I am attempting to . . . I might have several purposes — simply being provocative, for example. But mostly I am trying to annihilate Kierkegaard in order to deal with his disapproval. *Q*: Of Schlegel? *A*: Of me." The respondent then recites episodes from his daily life, an existence as bleak as the game-filled room, and only then does the Pasteur anecdote arrive as a stabbing period. Although the questioner falls silent when the writer loses himself in this elegaic fable of a lost, value-centered epoch, he remains an active and disruptive voice in *City Life,* the lucid linguistic intelligence that in "Brain Damage" reveals the *folie* in Barthelme's ironic language. For if the writer here confesses his own madness, *his* brain damage, it is his language itself that collapses in the piece. "Brain Damage" is a series of artistic flourishes broken by a refrain: "WHAT RECOURSE?" In each refrain the day-room activities of the insane (writhing, howling, retching, fainting, rhythmic handclapping, shouting, food consumption) are severally given in boldface, severe breaks in the text that disclose one specific absolute reached by the course of irony.

Yet in "The Sentence" the sentence goes on, asking the questions asked in "Brain Damage," those cruel Kierkegaardian questions: to what end, in whose name, what recourse? The ironist, Kierkegaard declares, "is conscious of the negativity of the infinite in existence, and he constantly keeps the wound of the negative open, which in the bodily realm is sometimes the condition for a cure. The others let the wound heal over and become positive; that is to say, they are deceived." Even Schlegel himself, discussing the "irony of irony" in 1789, recognized that only the "gods" could release one from the unending duplicity of ironic language, that in brief, as De Man convincingly argues, there is no deliverance in irony. Either one takes the Kierkegaardian leap of faith, a leap from ironic language, or one lapses into the autistic silence of Melville's Bartleby who moves inexorably from the refusal to write to the refusal to speak to the refusal of life. There is, needless to say, a Bartlebian figure in *Snow White,* the far-seeing dwarf, Bill, whose gradual self-surrender leads to his execution.

In *Sadness,* as I have suggested, Barthelme reconsiders the abyss opened in *City Life.* Although certain fictions recall the Kafkaesque mode employed in earlier volumes, specifically "A City of Churches" and "Subpoena," it is the opened wound of the negative, ironic self-consciousness, that engenders the book's controlling mood. "While I read the *Journal of Sensory Deprivation,*" the lead story, "Critique de la vie quotidienne," begins, "Wanda, my former wife, read *Elle.*" That note

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of comic separation spreads in *Sadness* to become the dominant conceit: the divorce of husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, confessors and confessed, ironic and artistic selves. In stories like "The Party" and "The Catechist" the loneliness of surveillance is quietly spoken: twenty years of looking and listening, so the priest-artist in "The Catechist" remembers. The cast of *Snow White* is reconvened in "The Party," there is more of their *blague,* but here it is the writer who toils, who turns finally on the intellect. When the priest-artist in "The Catechist" is led fatally by the catechist-self (the questioner again) to ironic expression (his paramour's husband is a psychologist engaged in measuring vanishing points), the "irony" is wearily noted. "There is no day on which this conversation is not held," the writer protests, "and no detail of this conversation which is not replicated on any particular day on which the conversation is held." Whereupon the catechist-self unrolls his dire Kierkegaardian banner: "YOU ARE INTERRUPTED IN THE MIDST OF MORE CONGENIAL WORK? BUT THIS IS GOD'S WORK." Kierkegaard's dispute with Schlegel is thus rejoined in *Sadness,* but in this instance the "negative thinker" is not only unfair to Schlegel, he is boorish as well. The curious dichotomy between art and ironic thought, never fully reconciled in Barthelme's fiction, widens in *Sadness.* His persistent lament that we can no longer comprehend the diversity of the world, that modern consciousness is blown like an overloaded fuse, blown into fragments, the fragments of his art, contains still another sorrow. Simply put, we know too much in knowing our ignorance.

Sadness restores the ethic declared by the rebellious Peterson in *Dr. Caligari*: flight from the tragic affirmation of absurdity by means of the absurd affirmation, withdrawal into comic fantasy. Yet the escape, and it is posed as just that in the concluding fiction, "Daumier," seems slight in achievement when set against the ironic stripping of radical pieties undertaken in "The Rise of Capitalism." In "Daumier" the writer contrives surrogates, fictive selves that will "in their clatter and boister and youthful brio . . . slay and bother and push out and put to all types of trouble the original, authentic self, which is a dirty great villain, as can be testified and sworn to by anyone who has ever been awake." The entertainment that follows is Tralfamadorian, the exit of Kurt Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse Five,* an imaginary trip to the "plains and pampas of consciousness" where Daumier leads a herd of slave girls and lives in the romances of Dumas. "There are always openings, if you can find them," the writer concludes, rephrasing

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Peterson's ode to possibility in *Dr. Caligari,* "there is always something to do." If only because the intellect that moves stroke by stroke through "The Rise of Capitalism," laying bare the contemptible truth, is still so comparatively fine, this surrogating self ought not to have the last word in *Sadness.* Kierkegaard, after all, was more than unfair to Schlegel; he was also a better artist.

Neil Schmitz

CRANKING THE ENGINE

IMAGIST POETRY. Edited by Peter Jones. Penguin Books. 35 p.

William Empson once described Imagist poetry as poetry that has lost the use of its legs, and if you read a bookful of Imagist poems straight off there is certainly a very good chance that you will be overcome by a feeling of not really getting anywhere. The feeling is not simply one of paralysis, though; it is also rather like finding yourself in a kind of aesthetic echo-chamber, where words and the silences that accompany them are set free to resonate more fully and more suggestively than they do in other sorts of poetry (not to mention life itself), but where the sense of privileged detachment that this carries with it — at times, it seems, almost of luxurious fiddling — eventually breeds an obscure guilt and the longing to return to the grittier and less purely aesthetic problems of the ordinary world.

The Imagists sometimes compounded this impression by the way in which they chose their subject matter. H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), one of the stars of the 1914 and subsequent Imagist anthologies and one of the few poets to remain a life-long Imagist, displayed in her poetry an allusive familiarity with classical literature — in particular with Greek poetry — which might have seemed gratifyingly civilized in, say, Matthew Arnold's England but which in a twentieth-century American was suggestive of an unreal degree of isolation from worldly matters. And it is a fact that this classical culture is nowhere in her poetry brought to *bear* on contemporary realities as it nearly always is by such poets as Eliot or Robinson Jeffers or Pound. When Pound launched Imagism in London in 1912 he was at his own extreme point of commitment to aesthetic values, and

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his comparatively early reaction against the movement is perhaps not altogether to be wondered at. One of H.D.'s poems, called "Oread," was singled out by Pound as the epitome of Imagism, and it is probably as good an example as any of the movement's distinctive virtues (in particular the fusion of the thing presented with the thing symbolised: "The image itself is the speech," as Pound put it) but also of its built-in tendency to neutralize and in part to denature its poetic material by over-aestheticizing it:

Whirl up, sea —
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

One can admire this — above all the rhythmic and mimetic mastery by *means* of which "the image itself is the speech" — and at the same time sympathize with the critics who would see it as an example of "petty poetry. . . . Such images should appear by the dozen in poetry" (Harold Monro). What the poem gives us is interrelating aspects of the sea, the forest and — more obscurely — the mountain-nymph of its title; what it excludes are aspects of those things which do not contribute to the metaphorical complex — like the sea's power in relation to human life, for example. For all its delicately caught movement the poem is essentially static, because the only thing it expresses is an aesthetic perception. The imagery, instead of being used to help with the telling of a particular story or the expression of a particular emotion, has become the whole *raison d'être* of the poem. The poem is really a kind of metapoem about poetic relationships.

The use of classical subjects or established mythologies was in fact no part of the Imagist program. The movement's most central claim was probably to take a fresh look at experience ("Direct treatment of the 'thing' " — F. S. Flint; "The scientist does not expect to be acclaimed as a great scientist until he has *discovered* something" — Pound), and this pursuit of freshness seems very often to have taken the form of a studious avoiding of the more obvious connotations of a "thing" simply because they are obvious rather than fresh. The dangers of approaching anything humanly important in this fashion are not very hard to see. A thing's most obvious implications will not be any the less im-

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portant or crucial to its nature just because they are obvious and have been noticed before; rather the contrary. Imagism, as practiced by its most faithful early devotees — Aldington, for example, or Flint — has a subtle incoherence built into its premises which amounts very nearly to a contradiction: the poet (since he is a poet) is drawn, however obscurely, to a situation which seems rich in meaning or which stirs his emotions or his senses; but he is then obliged, for more or less doctrinaire reasons, to ignore the most obvious and perhaps the most compelling aspects of the situation in the name of the pursuit of freshness; and because of the tacit emphasis on taking a fresh *look* he may even come to render the situation in exclusively — and misleadingly — visual terms (it was thus something near to a point of doctrine that so much Imagist poetry should seem tasteless, deodorized or disembodied; compare the number of moon-references with the number of sun-references in any collection of Imagist poetry, and so forth). Consider Aldington's poem "Evening":

The chimneys, rank on rank,
Cut the clear sky;
The moon,
With a rag of gauze about her loins
Poses among them, an awkward Venus —

And here am I looking wantonly at her
Over the kitchen sink.

The poet seems to feel himself confronted by a "poetic" (not to say "romantic") situation but at the same time to be paralyzed in his response to it. With the addition of a few more links one could imagine this poem becoming moving or psychologically penetrating, but it is not the poet's intention to supply the links. There is a certain static beauty about the lines, as with so much of Imagism, but the links which might lead from perception to action — and which must inevitably be links of emotion — are prevented from developing. There is an inbuilt chilling of response, which the moon as subject matter perfectly answers to (though it is also unsettling that she should be appearing here as Venus rather than Diana). It is as though the poet as Imagist-perceiver is standing to one side of himself as potential agent in the situation. In some Imagist poems — though not this one — the effect can verge on the eerily psychotic. (One way to produce satisfying poetry from within these constricting premises might be to take this paralysis, this syndrome of finding yourself a detached aesthetic observer of your own experience, and to

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make it the actual subject of your poem. The British poet Hugo Williams has recently written some effective poems along these lines.)

The most important question that arises out of Imagism, perhaps, is at what point the poet's moral responses must assert themselves and put the aesthetic purism in its place. This is really a question which arises *within the poem itself,* or rather within the prearticulate state of semiconsciousness which the poet draws on for his poem. Is the poet, as a person, solely concerned with the aesthetic aspects of experience? Since no one in fact could be, a wholly authentic "imagist" poem would have to contain within itself some truthful indication, however faint, of the poet's real attitude towards his own aestheticism. The question lies jointly at the roots both of morality and of artistic creation. This is worth saying, because the actual historical reaction against Imagism — both Pound's reaction against "general floppiness" and also the great wave of socially diagnostic poetry which eventually dominated the 1930s — was more like a swing of the pendulum than a solution of the problem.

The best poets, in any case, moved on — sensing perhaps that Imagism was a propedeutic to something else and that to go on being an Imagist was like calling in the plumber and then keeping him on as cook. The late phase of Imagism, presided over by Amy Lowell after Pound's defection, was essentially a free verse movement — although paradoxically the Amy Lowell anthologies contained some better poems and some no less interesting prefatory material than had appeared in Pound's *Des Imagistes* in 1914. The Amygist branch of the movement led mainly, via William Carlos Williams and some of his less talented disciples, to the comparatively recent school of projectivism and of poetry as (perfunctorily) versified talk. The belated imagist anthology of 1930 had a posthumous air about it.

The poets who passed through — or near to — Imagism and then left it behind (this can be said of Pound, Eliot, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, and many others) have defined between them a tradition which still seems forward-looking today. The poetry of this mainstream has the clarity and symbolic precision of Imagism but also the greatest — and most deliberately sought — subjectivity: the poem, whatever else it may also do, gets somewhere. The Imagists cranked the engine of twentieth-century poetry even if it was left to others to take the car on its journey.

Peter Jones's anthology *Imagist Poetry* is the best introduction to Imagism that has yet appeared. As well as a representative display of poems from the Imagist anthologies it includes a longish critical exposi-

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tion of the movement's aims and history, a neat and economical selection from the various prefaces and other theoretical documents, plus biographical notes on the poets. It is published, in a cheap paperback edition, in Britain where the movement began. The poetry itself reinforces even today the view of the London *Times Literary Supplement* when it said in 1916: "Imagist poetry fills us with hope; even when it is not very good in itself, it seems to promise a form in which very good poetry could be written." Another look at what Imagism did and did not do for poetry might revive some poetic hopes on both sides of the Atlantic at the present time.

Colin Falck

ROMANTIC ANXIETY

THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE: A THEORY OF POETRY. By Harold Bloom. Oxford University Press. $5.95.

In *The Mirror and the Lamp,* M. H. Abrams argued that there are "four elements in the total situation of a work of art." These elements are the work, the artist, the universe, and the audience. Any critical compound, Abrams continues, can be classified according to which element is most active within it. A theory that derives its criteria for definition, analysis, and judgment from the artist's relation to his work Abrams calls *expressive.* A theory founded on the work's adduced relation to an audience, on the work's capacity to move, please, or instruct, he calls *pragmatic.* A theory suspended on relations drawn between the work and its subject matter — the "universe" of nature, human nature, and human products — he calls *mimetic.* And a theory that severs the work from its relations to anything outside itself, so that the work as an autonomous object floats free of any ulterior motive, so that the relations of part to part and part to whole within the work are all there is to see — such a theory Abrams calls *objective.*

The Mirror and the Lamp was published in 1959. Since then at least one new element in the "total situation" of the work of literature has been isolated, processed, and mixed into new critical compounds. In 1957, in the *Anatomy of Criticism,* Northrop Frye provided us with the theoretical basis for a kind of criticism that relates the work not

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to its own constituents or to the artist or to the audience or to the universe, but to other works. This kind of criticism Frye called *archetypal.* It rests on T. S. Eliot's notion that past works of literature form an ideal order. A new work, as it enters this order, is defined by the old ones, which then rearrange themselves around the new one. Poems, plays, and novels would not be written were there not poems, plays, and novels written already; the new ones look the way they do because of the way the old ones look; the old ones look the way they do because of the way the new ones look. Once the rearrangement has taken place, that is, successors may become precursors. As that archetypal critic Borges notes, Kafka has become the major influence on Hawthorne.

Harold Bloom is another archetypal critic. "The meaning of a poem can only be another poem," he says. And his half-dozen books are attempts to cast out the bad influence that modernism has had on his beloved romantics. His method has been to rearrange the ideal order of past poems so that the romantics might become the major influence on the "strongest" moderns — among whom, however, Bloom does not include Pound, Eliot, Auden, Williams, Yeats after 1900, or the Stevens who esteemed things as they are as much as the sound of them on the blue guitar. But Bloom no longer feels comfortable with the term "archetypal" — because of "the recent transformation of Northrop Frye into the Arnold of our age," because Eliot has had an especially bad influence on romanticism ("We need to thrust aside, once and for all, the critical absurdities of the Age of Eliot"), because archetypal criticism as practiced by others has become "moralizing" and reductive. So have the recent schools of objective, expressive, pragmatic, and mimetic criticism:

> The issue is reduction and how best to avoid it. Rhetorical, Aristotelian, phenomenological, and structuralist criticisms all reduce, whether to images, ideas, given things, or phonemes. Moral or blatant philosophical or psychological criticisms all reduce to rival conceptualizations. We reduce — if at all — to another poem.

In his new book, then, Bloom advertises a kind of criticism he calls *antithetical,* although it looks archetypal to me:

> All criticisms that call themselves primary vacillate between tautology — in which the poem is and means itself — and reduction — in which the poem means something that is not itself a poem. Antithetical criticism must begin by denying both tautology and reduc-

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> tion, a denial best delivered by the assertion that the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but *another poem — a poem not itself.* And not a poem chosen with total arbitrariness, but any central poem by an indubitable precursor, even if the ephebe [the influenced poet] *never read* that poem. Source study is wholly irrelevant here; we are dealing with primal words, but antithetical meanings, and an ephebe's best misinterpretations may well be of poems he has never read.

Antithetical criticism, when it arrives, will be a commentary on the dark "story of inter-poetic relationships" that *The Anxiety of Influence* unfolds in words portentous and sibylline. The story is a version of our old favorite, the Family Romance; its players are reincarnations of Oedipus, Laius, Jocasta, the Sphinx. The ephebe, the aspiring young poet, must first get past the Sphinx, a "Covering Cherub," symbol of the "negative or stifling aspect of poetic influence," the Primal Scene itself. ("But what is the Primal Scene for a poet *as poet?* It is the Poetic Father's coitus with the Muse.") The ephebe then kills his Poetic Father by misreading him. He wants to be entirely original, self-begotten, so he tries to "engender himself upon the Muse his mother." But he fails; he must wait in fear and trembling for the arrival of his Son, who will murderously define him even as he defined his own Poetic Father. A bad business, and Bloom's gloom is no more than the occasion warrants:

> If the imagination's gift comes necessarily from the perversity of the spirit, then the living labyrinth of literature is built upon the ruin of every impulse most generous in us. So apparently it is and must be — we are wrong to have founded a humanism directly upon literature itself, and the phrase "humane letters" is an oxymoron.

The ephebe's career points a moral informed by a mood, "the melancholy of the creative mind's desperate insistence upon priority." Like all Oedipal types he is wracked by anxiety, and "this anxiety, this mode of melancholy, is the anxiety of influence, the dark and demonic ground." He is anxious to be first, he is anxious because he is not first, he is anxious because of what he must do to his Poetic Father while battling for his majority, which depends on a claim of priority. He must misread, misinterpret, distort, revise, and usurp. The antithetical criticism Bloom has in mind will be a study of the six "revisionary ratios," the six forms of "misprision" or wrongdoing, that govern the relations between ephebe and precursor. And the proper antithetical critic will keep in mind that the revisionary ratios "have the same function in

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inter-poetic relations that defense mechanisms have in our psychic life."

Here are the six revisionary ratios, the six poetic defense mechanisms against the anxiety of influence: 1. *Clinamen.* The ephebe swerves away from his precursor in such a way as to suggest that precisely where the ephebe swerves the precursor went wrong. 2. *Tessera.* The ephebe completes the precursor, but antithetically; he retains tokens from the precursor's work, but uses them in senses that make it look as though the precursor lacked what it takes to go all the way. 3. *Kenosis.* The ephebe purges himself of whatever afflatus he has absorbed from the precursor; it is an apparent act of self-abnegation that is in fact a way of deflating the precursor. 4. *Daemonization.* The ephebe demonically opens himself to a numinous power in the precursor's work; but he pretends that the power came to that work from outside the precursor. The precursor is thus made to look no more than human. 5. *Askesis.* The ephebe estranges himself from any portions of his own imaginative endowment that coincide with his precursor's so as to dramatize the distinction between them. Both poets shrink in the process of this desperate measure. 6. *Apophrades* (or the "Return of the Dead"). The ephebe now holds his work so open, so masterfully open, to the precursor that the latter's most characteristic work has the uncanny look of having been written by the former. Shelley, in Bloom's example, seems to be imitating Yeats.

That example is one of the few given, which is one reason why these revisionary ratios are hard to grasp. Luckily, it doesn't much matter whether you have gotten them right, or whether I have gotten them right, or even if Bloom has gotten them right if, that is, you like your criticism antithetical. To read imaginatively is to read antithetically and is, therefore, to misinterpret, for critics as well as poets. All worthwhile criticism is misprision, a form of creative misunderstanding. As precursors are read by ephebes, we have to read the ephebes — "as if we were their disciples, and so compel ourselves to learn where we must revise them if we are to be found by our own work, and claimed by the living of our own lines." Critics are also wracked by the anxiety of influence into a self-preserving misinterpretation of their own sacred texts.

But Bloom is wracked too much, another reason why his revisionary ratios are hard to grasp. His prose in this book (as distinct from his others, which are simply garrulous) is a treasury of anxiety symptoms. It is confiding in its evasions and evasive in its confidences (especially

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when Bloom confides "my own evasions," among which I would include his "addiction to a Romantic and prophetic humanism," whatever that is). The prose is a system of pointed indirection and suppressed linkage, or occult connection, pregnant silence, and nervous glance over the shoulder. The gaps in his logic fill and overflow with a secret but salient ambition — "There are no interpretations but only misinterpretations, and so all criticism is prose poetry." The sentences are as tight as the scrotum of a good boy out to disobey his parents and half hoping to be caught. (Other critics have parricidal designs on poets, or on Eliot, Frye, and the New Critics, but they don't teach at Yale.) The prose is implacably humorless and gratuitously depressed. Bloom mumps and grumps, kvetches and has qualms — about the brutality of Yeats, about the "exhaustions of being a late-comer," about the imminent death of poetry, about the dubious motives of indubitable geniuses. For him poetry itself is one more downer: "The writing (and reading) of poems is a sacrificial process, a purgation that drains more than it replenishes." These are the accents of romantic *Weltschmerz*: anxiety converts the gestures of daring into a self-regarding and melodramatic pathos.

At one point Bloom describes his book as offering "a theory of poetry that presents itself as a severe poem, reliant upon aphorism, apothegm, and a quite personal (though thoroughly traditional) mythic pattern." It is "a grim romance of the critical quest." And sure enough, the six epigrammatic chapters of the quest proper, one for each of the revisionary ratios, are introduced by a parable of the poet's situation, concluded by a parable of the critics's situation, and divided in half by an "interchapter," a Manifesto of Antithetical Criticism. Such shapeliness is pleasing. But Bloom seems to have forgotten Coleridge's precept to the effect that a poem is a verbal structure each part of which, in addition to the whole, gives pleasure. Our pleasure in Bloom's sentences is dampened by the anxiety, which is wetted down further by the pathos, when it should have been dried and hardened by irony. (The only irony of note in the book is its dedication to W. K. Wimsatt.) This critical quest is not "grim"; it is lugubrious. You would think that in the process of quoting Nietzsche a few times Bloom might have noticed how it is one competes with poetry through the use of aphorism, apothegm, and parable. Unlike Nietzsche's epigrams, Bloom's sag at the corners when they should be drawn back in a *risus sardonicus*. Bloom is not arrogant enough to be brilliant. He is solicitous, and even less forgivably, he is sincere. His pessimism, unlike Nietzsche's, is de-

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pressing rather than exhilarating. *The Anxiety of Influence* is allover gray, although Bloom clearly meant it to illuminate our minds with flashes of the outrageous half-truths that are on the undersides of received ideas.

In judging the *how* of this "severe poem" rather than its *what,* its form rather than its content, I am merely acting upon one of Bloom's solicitations. He encourages a criticism, even a criticism of criticism, that is personal and aesthetic rather than impersonal and conceptual. And in any case, a judgment of the book's *what* is contained in a judgment of its *how*. Yes, poets and critics misread, misinterpret, distort, revise, and usurp. And they probably do so more or less through the six processes to which Bloom gives those fancy names, although that is not all they do, even (in Bloom's weaseling phrase) *"as poets."* But something else Nietzsche might have taught his ephebe is that all "reading," all perceiving and conceiving of everything, is misprision, is a reenactment of the primal wrongdoing of Oedipus. All descriptions of the world do violence to it. All understandings are misunderstanding in behalf of survival. But if Nietzsche had had his way, Oedipus would have remained Lord of Thebes, seeing there what he needed to see in order to live as he needed to live, rather than slinking off self-blinded into exile. The strength of Bloom's "strong" poets lies precisely in the fact that above all they hung on to their visions; above all they refused to budge from the worlds they had won with imaginative violence.

Bloom emphasizes the cost rather than the accomplishment, the aspect of the poetry of defense mechanism rather than that of accomplished sublimation. And he does so in part, at least, because he cannot believe that poets have accomplished much since the death of Shelley. He has no imaginative sympathy whatsoever for literary modernism, the great examples of which did not suffer from a romantic anxiety of influence. The modernist writers who established themselves during the teens and twenties felt that an historical chasm separated them from their immediate precursors. The line leading up to them had a break in it. The past to them was a museum, and tradition a chest of souvenirs, rather than swells on whose crests they rode struggling to keep their heads above precursors. So they chose their influences where it suited them. The English novelists looked to Russia, France, and the United States. Pound made up a tradition flowing from the Chinese through the Greek Anthology through the troubadours through the symbolists to himself. Eliot made up a tradition flowing from Dante through the metaphysicals through the symbolists to himself. No important poet

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of their generation felt very anxious about the romantics or about Tennyson and Browning; no important modernist fiction writer felt much anxiety about Dickens, Thackeray, and Meredith. Their anxieties had other causes, most of them extraliterary. Their main literary anxieties were not the effect of a fear that they would be swallowed by precursors, but the effect of a feeling that all the forms had exhausted themselves or that under modern conditions literature was no longer possible. Thus the polemical stress on making it new, thus the critical and parodistic dimensions of modernist literature, thus the ironic self-consciousness of works that are aware of themselves as poems, plays, and novels when poems, plays, and novels are no longer possible, a self-consciousness that makes old forms new.

In emphasizing the cost rather than the accomplishment, the blinding and exile rather than the heady years of rule, Bloom arranges for his own defeat in what might have been a stirring assault on Frye, Eliot, and the New Critics, on the phenomenologists, structuralists, philosophizers, and moralizers. Whatever Bloom is like in the flesh, the anxiety in *The Anxiety of Influence* is not that of the Oedipus, but that of Hippolytus, whose career is a cautionary tale of those good boys who would rather turn their anxieties in upon themselves than rule the roost. It is one more of those romanticisms that modernism helped us to outgrow.

George Stade

EVERYWOMAN OUT OF LOVE?

THE SUMMER BEFORE THE DARK. By Doris Lessing. Knopf. $6.95.

A really good book resists reviewing, and *The Summer Before the Dark* is a really good book. The ending leaves me somewhat dazed and confused, like life. Despite the allegorical overtones of the narrative (which, at times, I found irritating), the novel finally has the density and dreaminess of reality itself. For all her occasional polemicism, Doris Lessing has no program for womankind nor for civilization. Her characters are not "little engines of cause and effect"; "they wander in the dark woods of their destiny" — to borrow two of my favorite phrases from D. H. Lawrence's "The Novel and the Feelings." Lessing has, in

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fact, a great deal in common with Lawrence. The same rigorously moral preoccupations, the same understanding that sexual and political revolution are inseparable, the same concern for the masks women wear in a male-dominated culture. She also has certain faults in common with Lawrence, particularly her tendencies toward didacticism and overwriting. Yet it is always clear while reading her that one is in contact with a first-rate mind. I believe she is one of the twentieth-century writers by whom literary critics of the future will know us; and perhaps this is because she is intelligent enough to be unfashionable.

I also have a sneaking suspicion that Doris Lessing is a great writer — whatever that is.

The Summer Before the Dark has been compared to *The Golden Notebook* because the ostensible subjects of both books are the same: the dilemmas of intelligent women in a world made by and for men. Yet, in the straightforwardness of its narrative, *The Summer Before the Dark* reminds me much more of Lessing's earlier Martha Quest novels. *The Golden Notebook* and *The Four-Gated City* are dense, long, layered books: books within books. *The Summer Before the Dark* whizzes by in a mere 273 pages. Similarly, its heroine, Kate Brown, seems far plainer and less obsessive than either Anna Wulf or Martha Quest. She is a "serviceable woman"; a machine for translation; "a skilled parrot"; "a fluent parrot with maternal inclinations"; a woman with "the sympathetic eyes of a loving spaniel." Above all, she is a mother, a wife, a nurse, a nanny. So it is, in a way, even more astonishing when *this* woman becomes ill, enraged, wasted, and is stripped of her masks. One expects such existential extremes from an Anna Wulf or a Martha Quest. One does not expect them from pretty, "serviceable" Kate Brown.

And perhaps that is exactly Lessing's point. Or one of them.

It is clear from the very start of the book that Kate Brown is a kind of mid-twentieth-century Everywoman. "A woman stood . . ." the book begins; and that phrase is echoed at crucial times throughout the narrative. Kate Brown is "a woman." Her very name is faceless, universal, blank. Lessing intends her as Everywoman (which was one of the things I found off-putting about the book for the first hundred pages or so), and a main point of hers seems to be that at this moment in history, even the pretty, serviceable Kate Browns of this world are cracking up. Even *they* cannot make sense of all the contradictions of their lives.

Raised to be maternal, they have to face the flight of their grown children. Raised to believe in love as a kind of substitute religion, they

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have to face its disintegration. Raised to be nurturant, they have to face the fact that most of the world's children are starving. Raised to believe in progress, reform, socialism, they have to face the resurgence of authoritarianism. Raised to give their lives to their families, they have to face the fact that families are obsolete.

Most of the action of the novel is depicted in a detached third person narrative which resembles the telling of a fable or parable. The writing is graceful (especially compared to *The Golden Notebook*), slightly ironic, and from Kate's point of view. She is a tireless and precise observer of everyone, including herself. Yet during the first part of the book, she seemed such a universal type that she was slightly unreal to me. (The author seemed to recognize this problem later in the novel, when she spoke of Kate "evading something by putting [it] in the third person.") The power of the story became irresistible toward the end, however, when Kate, back in London and living with a young woman named Maureen, engages in endless conversations about marriage, motherhood, growing older. These seemed to me the most convincing scenes in the book: the dialogue not only accurate but profound; not only convincing for these two particular characters but for all of us. It is, I think, the job of the novel to work from particularity to generality rather than the other way around. And in these dialogues, Lessing succeeds brilliantly at stating the dilemmas of contemporary humanity. They are not resolved, of course. Whether Kate's choice of a quarter century of childbearing and wifehood was "right" or "wrong" is something neither Kate nor Lessing can tell us. Whether Maureen ought to imitate Kate or rebel is also not resolved — either by the characters or the author. Kate does not *know* whether her choice was "right" and so she cannot tell Maureen. Lessing certainly does not know, though she implies, by the resolution of Kate's recurrent dream about a dying seal, that the maternal virtues Kate exemplifies have some life-giving power after all. But the very value of life-giving is uncertain in a world where too many babies are born and many must die. The maternal gifts which Kate has built her life around are obsolete, and Lessing knows this. Kate also knows it at the end; but what is she to do? She has been prepared for nothing else. Her needs and the world's needs are out of step. And Maureen, though twenty-five years younger, suffers the same discontinuity between her emotions and the outer reality. Maureen's habit of wearing old clothes ("putting on the clothes of the circumscribed women of the past") is a perfect metaphor for this. A twentieth-century girl who loathes the idea of being like her mother, she nevertheless longs for

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the clothes of a Jane Austen heroine and the emotions which go with them. Maureen is no less obsolete than Kate.

It would be easy and glib for a reviewer to see this as "the dilemma of modern woman" and thus put all Lessing's disturbing observations about contemporary society at arm's length. "Woman's novel," like "Black novel," is simply one more way of saying, "That doesn't apply to *me*." And certainly many reviewers (even those who raved about this book) put the limiting adjective "woman's" around it and tried to slink away. But, of course, Lessing is smarter than they are. She is no more talking *only* about women than Ralph Ellison is talking only about blacks in *The Invisible Man*. Lessing knows that in women, the conditions of alienation, waste of resources, discontinuity between emotions and "reality," are simply more visible and painful. But the problems themselves are those of all of us. Overpopulation and starvation, the obsolescence of the family and the resurgence of authoritarianism are not "women's problems" — comfortable though it may be to see them that way.

The feminist publishing boom has provided its own built-in evasions. That freak show of women over there, that fad, that gaggle of geese — is not simply fifty-three percent of humanity and not simply a passing fancy. When having and raising babies is no longer honorific and necessary, then both sexes have to change. A book that considers such changes is not "women's fiction" but people's fiction. Kate Brown is not Everywoman; she is everyone.

Erica Jong

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

POE POE POE POE POE POE POE. By Daniel Hoffman. Doubleday and Co. $7.95.

SWINBURNE: AN EXPERIMENT IN CRITICISM. By Jerome J. McGann. The University of Chicgo Press. $12.00.

KEATS AND HIS POETRY: A STUDY IN DEVELOPMENT. By Morris Dickstein. The University of Chicago Press. $9.50.

IMAGINATION AND POWER: A STUDY OF POETRY ON PUBLIC THEMES. By Thomas R. Edwards. Oxford University Press. $6.00.

Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe, Daniel Hoffman's brilliant and illuminating study, exasperates almost beyond the limits of endurance. Even the most sympathetic reader will wince at the coy informality,

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the condescending nicknames, the self-indulgent confessions, the corn-ball phrasemaking: "We'll meet him as Hoaxiepoe, as Inimitable Edgar the Variety Artist, as Horror-Haunted Edgar, as . . . but I'm getting ahead of myself here"; "He was after all an acolyte of the Mistress of Words, not a thane of the Master of Numbers"; "Poor, poor Eddie Poe." In the spirit of Poe's fascination with doubles, the book has two heroes, Poe the writer and Hoffman his critic, and the reader is expected to recognize the mysterious interpenetration of their spiritual destinies. In Hoffman's words, "Edgarpoe wormed his way into my guts and gizzard and haunted my brain and laid a spell upon my soul which this long harangue is an attempt to exorcise." Hoffman presents Roderick Usher's description as Poe's verbal self-portait, and tells us that "Poe, too, had mused upon his image in a glass." Who else has seen his own image as in a mirror? The dust jacket gives it all away. On the cover are seven pictures of Poe (one for each Poe in the title), and on the back is a single, larger portrait of Hoffman, a Poe without a moustache, the same broad forehead and fine nose, the same peaks of hair over ears and crown. Poe's height, writes Hoffman, was "my own stature exactly."

The reader may be put off by all this, and yet Hoffman comes very close to earning the right to his audacious posturing. In preparing for his climactic discussion of "The Fall of the House of Usher" by asking repeatedly, at key moments in the book, "Why did Roderick Usher put his sister living in the tomb?" Hoffman shows some of Poe's ability, here adapted idiosyncratically to a critical work, to create effects of ominousness and suspense. Hoffman asserts that the ingenious crimes of Poe's tales can be solved only by people capable of committing them; criminal and detective are doubles. Discussing "The Gold Bug" in these terms, he explicates the scene in which the treasure is recovered as a mirror image of the scene in which it is buried, with Legrand and Captain Kidd as spiritual and intellectual twins distinguished precariously from one another by only a fragile difference in "moral equipment." He speculates brilliantly and logically on the relationship in "The Purloined Letter" between Dupin, the detective, and D———, the criminal, and comes to a chilling conclusion which transforms the story into a vision of "hopeless love and savory horror and suicide." Flashes of insight such as these tend to justify Hoffman's egotism: only a reader who is "Poe's stature exactly" can uncover the concealed horror and threatening violence in these tales of "ratiocination." These are high moments in the book, when the opposed but reciprocal imaginations of critic and author

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resonate to produce something like the effects of art. But even when Hoffman's posturings seem mere pretensions and his idiosyncrasies mere encumbrances, his knowledge and understanding of Poe emerge. Making useful reference to previous commentary, relevant philosophy and psychological theory, and historical and literary contexts, Hoffman presents Poe's diverse literary performance as a comprehensible whole, and testifies convincingly to Poe's power and greatness.

Jerome McGann's fine book on Swinburne also has its annoying idiosyncrasies. Subtitled *An Experiment in Criticism,* the study is cast in dialogue form, the speakers being minor early twentieth-century commentators on the poet, resurrected and suitably transformed. McGann has his fun. Clara Watts-Dunton, for example, the wife of Swinburne's friend and protector, Theodore, and the author of *The Home Life of Swinburne,* presents the book's most sophisticated view of the poetry, in language which rivals Geoffrey Hartman's in ease of intelligibility. The book begins with an argument about the best mode for introducing its subject. On one thing only can the characters agree: that a certain essay, " 'Ave atque Vale': An Introduction to Swinburne," is inadequate to its purpose. The author? Jerome McGann. McGann seems to think better of the essay than his spokesmen, for he republishes it as an appendix.

In his description of his method, McGann implies that the study reaches no conclusions. No "single generalizing conception" of Swinburne emerges, he says; "a master's voice has been dispensed with," and the dialogue form "illustrates, in a dramatic and recreative fashion, the absurd limits of analytical knowledge." The mannered prose of the Introduction, in which McGann makes these assertions, may or may not signal a hoax; in any case, what he says is false. The master's voice is heard despite the disguises. McGann expands the boundaries of analytical knowledge, and offers a general conception of Swinburne, evident in a complex pattern of related insights, and focused at the very end of the book: " 'Sky, and shore, and cloud, and waste, and sea': is all this bleakness or is it beauty? Swinburne reminds us how and why it is and must be both." The movement in the dialogue is toward clarification and certainty. The insights once achieved, no amount of self-deprecatory play can discredit them, any more than Swinburne's self-parodies invalidate the style he makes fun of.

An example: McGann has W. G. Blaikie Murdoch attack Swinburne for vagueness. Coulson Kernahan makes a defense along lines

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summed up by Mrs. Watts-Dunton: "Swinburne deliberately puts meaning beyond the grasp of the cognitive faculties by creating immensely difficult poetic systems or relations. . . . he simultaneously presents those systems as perfected closures which, though they do not define a comprehensive meaning, represent the fact and the idea of wholeness." Mrs. Watts-Dunton goes on to present another kind of defense, not as an alternative, but as a supplement: Swinburne "offers not a compensatory but a transformed experience. . . . What is gained . . . is openness, figured as sleep-trance and often experienced in reading as 'difficulty,' 'vagueness,' and a recurring sense of abstraction." That Murdoch remains unsatisfied may demonstrate the limitations of analysis; there will always be people who can't be convinced. But this episode does not show that the limitations of analysis are *absurd*. Kernahan and Mrs. Watts-Dunton have found clear ways to formulate in words the sources of that strange power so many people have experienced from Swinburne's language, and there is no question but that McGann expects us to recognize the force of their statements. As the dialogue progresses, such insights proliferate, and their validity is substantiated by concrete analysis of individual works. Layer upon layer of interpretation adds dimension to an expanding view of Swinburne's achievement, and McGann provides perspectives in which to see apparently disparate parts — Swinburne's indebtedness, for example, to writers as diverse as Baudelaire and Victor Hugo, his writing of works as different as imitations of classical tragedies and naughty little mock epics about schoolboy flagellations — as elements of a complicated whole. This is not merely the first serious critical book on Swinburne to appear in years; McGann is one of the few critics ever to respond adequately to this very great poet.

Hoffman and McGann offer comprehensive perspectives on their subjects and commit themselves to certain lines of interpretation, but they don't argue for specific theses. In contrast, Morris Dickstein, author of *Keats and his Poetry,* attempts to define a specific and original view of Keats, and to distinguish it from other interpretations — no easy task, for the massive and various attention Keats has received in the twentieth century would seem to have exhausted critical possibilities. In Dickstein's view, Keats's career culminates not in poetry of vision, in which the integrated imagination produces self-contained works of art uniting in new syntheses the diversities of experience — not in "naturalistic" poetry, expressing realistic acceptance of actuality — but in "poetry of self-confrontation." To summarize in very rough terms, Keats's early

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poetry, according to Dickstein, presents the self in opposition to reality and expresses longing for a condition in which the experience of opposition is absent, a condition of something like sleep, of safe enclosure, as in a bower. After *Endymion,* in the psychologically stormy year of 1818 whose conflicts and tensions Dickstein shows to be definitely present during Keats's visit to Scotland (to the heaths of the North rather than the bowers of the South), Keats learns to confront the self that longs for passive oblivion. As a result of the confrontation, a new self emerges; and the dialectic of the two selves is the major theme of the great odes. That is, Keats "turns inward like Wordsworth and writes of the growth of a poet's mind," and the outcome is "self-renewal rather than extinction." The first half of the book is somewhat long-winded and repetitive, most notably in the seventy-seven-page chapter on *Endymion,* and will probably be of interest only to Keats specialists. But in the last half of the book the argument becomes tighter, more precise and economical, sometimes even eloquent. One may not be convinced by Dickstein's thesis, but there is much to be learned from what he has to say about some of the great later poems.

In my judgment, Dickstein's thesis is convincing — but incomplete. What is so impressive about Hoffman and McGann is the comprehensiveness of their work; while they certainly do not exhaust their subjects, there seem to be no willful exclusions. That Dickstein writes off *The Eve of St. Agnes* and calls *To Autumn* a "seemingly effortless footnote to the odes of April and May" is symptomatic of the minimal attention he pays to the rich and precise sensuousness of Keats's later work. He sees the cryptic message of the Grecian Urn — " 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' " — to be severely limited in its application by Keats's sense of the sterility of fixity. Many beautiful things mislead, and many truths are ugly. Yet it seems almost willful to minimize the profound and healthy attractiveness of those fixed moments of delicious anticipation imaged on that urn, and to gloss over the exact lushness of diction: "Thou still unravished bride of quietness . . . What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape?" This controlled sensuousness bears with it a strange authority, at the very least the authority of discriminating appreciativeness. Beauty can strike the mind with the impact of truth, and Keats, in confessing this, is not merely expressing "nostalgia for the kind of art he has left behind"; he is facing a human reality.

There are few critics practicing in the present day who can write as intelligently and sensitively about a poem as Thomas Edwards, author of *Imagination and Power: A Study of Poetry on Public Themes.* Ed-

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wards is responsive to every nuance of tone, every shade of meaning, and again and again he finds the right language to bring the reader in touch with the finest of subtleties and the most difficult of complexities. Edwards knows the political and social contexts of the poems he discusses, and refers to them relevantly and with great tact; he knows the previous commentary, and uses it respectfully. Whether he writes on poems by Spenser, Dryden, Blake, or Robert Lowell, Edwards has a gift for finding the right perspective, the appropriate critical entrance.

Hoffman and McGann mask and obscure their certainties with confessional and dramatic devices; they manifest a familiar nervousness about the possibilities of dealing directly and objectively with a subject. Even Dickstein reveals a certain defensiveness in his relatively narrow and exclusive emphasis on a feature in Keats which has special appeal for the modern sensibility. Edwards is the most cautious of all about making claims for his critical enterprise. His is a "book of speculations and guesses." He does "venture some hypotheses," but there is no thesis. Indeed, his principles of selectivity are casual; the poems he examines, culled from English literature from the Renaissance to the present, do not represent parallel examples. In a book discussing poetry on public themes, he rejects the Victorians out of hand. Now, it may be true that the "best" Victorian poetry "was a consequence of feeling that art is irrelevant to public practice" and therefore inappropriate to Edwards's concerns (but what about *In Memoriam, The Ring and the Book,* and *Songs Before Sunrise*?); yet, having insisted by implication on dealing only with the "best," Edwards would seem to be inconsistent in selecting for discussion what are by his own admission some of the worst poems of Eliot and Auden. If a poet like Gray merits attention on the grounds that "the imaginative avoidance of politics is itself a response to politics," a poem based on a feeling of art's irrelevance to public practice would seem to be an appropriate object of study.

Despite the absence of thesis, and despite Edwards's suspicion of poetic attempts to aestheticize experience in self-contained, symbolic systems, the book in a general way does forward certain values, those values of sensibility which Edwards himself so ably dramatizes in his responses to poems; and in this commitment the book approaches a kind of aestheticism. Edwards assumes that social and political awareness is "less coherent and subtle" than the "imaginative awareness that creates art." Even the most creative acts of public figures, it would seem, are generated by inferior sensibilities. The mission of the poet, then, is remedial: "the successful public poem criticizes and chastens the public

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awareness of ordinary men by seeing through the habits of rhetoric and feeling that conceal from us the full complexity of our relation to politics and power." Edwards shows how certain poems, for example Marvell's *Horatian Ode,* Yeats's *Easter 1916,* and Lowell's *Inauguration Day,* are successful in these terms. What these poems help us see are the difficulties of choice, the diversity of claims upon us, the necessity of heightened awareness, not the possibilities for commitment or the supremacy of certain practical values or the means by which one can win his way through to constructive decency in his public actions. Says Edwards, typically, of the *Horatian Ode,* "It represents a man trying to make up his mind and finding that the impossibility of doing so, conclusively, makes *having* a mind all the more imperative and exciting."

Hoffman, McGann, and Dickstein all identify more active and inspirational powers in the writers they study. In McGann's view, Swinburne's poetry offers a lesson in the illusiveness of transcendence and perfectibility, and in the correlative necessity for immersion in the finite. "To be born for death, to suffer limitation, to know that neither this nor any other age will consummate human experience: these ideas, for Swinburne, represent what it means to be free." And later: "Seeking to gain his life beyond chance and death, [the hero] ends up losing it in mutability." Dickstein finds a similar idea in Keats: "He who commits himself to 'breathing human passion' must also accept 'a heart high sorrowful and cloy'd, / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.' The odes tell the story of that commitment and acceptance, of the finitude that is not 'a curse on life' but rather 'a promise of life.' " And Hoffman sees in Poe self-mastery and spiritual commitment based on his confrontation in himself with dangerous impulses of universal significance: "Poe had understood, had intuited, had *felt* as true the undeniable principle that we, and our universe, contain within ourselves, intrinsic with our very being, the seeds of our own destruction — which we unconsciously *long for.*" The poet who had this insight had something to say of both private and public significance to all men, and the issue raised involves more than awareness of fuller complexity. Strangely, one gets a less vivid sense of the active, reciprocal relationship between literature and life from Edwards's explications of poems on public themes than from these studies of writers who have often been dismissed as decadent aesthetes. Surely Poe, Swinburne, and Keats were dreamers of aesthetic visions; and yet, as the critics under consideration here have shown us, they have also had powerful things to say about the realities we all experience.

Paul Zietlow

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TELLING TIME

FALLING. By Susan Fromberg Schaeffer. Macmillan. $6.95.

In a season of huge fictions hailed or at least harped on as blockbusters, it is heartening to salute a much less explosive affair, a headlong novel concerned, helter-skelter, with putting the block back together instead of busting it up — with reconstituting from the shards of one young woman's shell-shocked consciousness as a middle-class Jewish daughter and a middle-class Jewish university instructor and a middle-class Jewish sexpot, what is conceived, by the end of *Falling,* to be what *was* conceived at the start: prolegomena to any future family life. But the old expression is the right one: *family circle,* for the book is, in its genre, an anagnorisis, one extended recognition scene, an acknowledgment of the terrible wheel of generations whereon we become the parents of our parents yet are their children still. The becoming, in the case of Elizabeth Kamen who bears the brunt of the fall, brings with it a certain precarious freedom won or wrung from that circle by luck and energy and even by well-timed submission. Her case — clinical at times and comical throughout — is a rehearsal of what Jane Harrison means, in a famous chapter of *her* prolegomena, "The Making of a Goddess," when she describes the growth of a human function from imprecation and warding-off, to acceptance and nourishment, to welcoming and prayer.

I do not want to make extravagant claims for Susan Schaeffer's novel — it is written in a fashion so unassuming that it barely accommodates the wry notation of each night's toad and each day's toadying which constitute the *timbre* of urban academic life (Brooklyn and Chicago). But I want to give credit where it is extravagantly due: *Falling* has three triumphs in it, all of them technically registered despite the unkempt prose. Indeed the workaday nature of the medium may have a lot to do with the very significance of the matter in hand — it may be why the matter is in hand. I can imagine that the author, a poet *in real life,* has had to pay dearly for what *she* has imagined so deliberately, so distinctly. They are worth singling out, then, Susan Schaeffer's successes, they are worth separating from the sensible tweed of her prose, for I suspect the novel itself will not suit the usual categories of first novels by women — will not itself be a success. *Falling* is not instinct with that towering *ressentiment* we have come to expect from the confessional artist, the artist-as-victim; it does not tote that disaffected

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snarling and sneering which are the carrying charges for breaking into print these days if you are young, gifted, and female. Enough, then, is as good as a feast: I shall not loiter over this funny, deprecatory book, beyond hoarding its three achievements, which seem to me fine ones.

First is the way *telling time* is made an index of sanity. By the actual construction of the book, its welter of voices and jamming of epochs in Elizabeth Kamen's life, gradually clarified, as the chefs say, to a linear imposition upon the spinning dials, the author has found a way of rehearsing her theme: the escape from that kind of ritual family time which is always repetitive, self-numbing, and merely mythic, to the tentative singular, the consciousness that one thing happened and then another happened *because* that one thing happened *first*. It is the very awareness of causality which is at stake here, and the stakes are high. A great deal of the pain and problematic association in *Falling* goes into the gradual sense that life is not only a circle but also a line, that there is not only myth but history, and the acquisition of this sense is part of Susan Schaeffer's second achievement. She has used the psychoanalytic session — her character's relation to the fifty-minute hour, to the physician, and to the function of analysis itself — she has used these things dramatically, technically, as a part of her book, as a part of Elizabeth Kamen's discovery of her own autonomous powers. And continuing powers. Analysts in fiction are generally botched by their assumption of divine powers, or by an author's need to destroy their access to any power at all. Here the attractive thing about Dr. Greene is the equanimity of his role in Elizabeth's life, the careful consequences of what he says during the sessions, which are reported in cool detail:

> "You may have to go through this many times before it is finally over," Dr. Greene said, somewhat sadly. Elizabeth did not understand: "Through what?" "Through leaving me," he clarified, "you have come back, and in a few days you will do it again. There are many ways of leaving," he elaborated, "you may go through one dreadful relationship after another until you tire yourself out; you will do this to prove that no man is any good, that they will all desert you as I have done."

The achievement of narrative, then — of *telling time,* and the achievement of drama — of *using time,* in the psychoanalytic function, combine, in the course of this novel's singular passion — singular because singled out, made to bear the weight of an absorbing scrutiny — in the third achievement, the most touching of all, which is the achievement

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of forgiveness, of *losing time*. For in the unconscious, in our dreams, as Elizabeth Kamen surely learned with Dr. Greene, there is no time, there is only the articulation of meaning, the representation of what signifies:

> The dream still seemed to hover in the corners of the room. "Can you swim, Elizabeth?" her mother was asking her. "Yes, mother," she said, "you hold me, and I'll kick." Her mother, who was terrified of the water, held her, and she kicked. Waves of time broke against the white walls like surf. She leaned over and woke up Adam. "We better get going," she said, while somewhere behind her eyes, the woman and child were falling and falling, like a feather, or stone.

That is the end of the book, and it is an emblem — without time, breaking time's hold — of a freedom won. The falling is a falling away of the old bondage, but it is a falling off as well, it is a loss, a lessening, and what Elizabeth learns in the book is that she herself will be reduced by every victory she scores over her mother. For we give ourselves up when we give up our parents by becoming them, and that is why the falling is so ambiguous, feather or stone. Susan Schaeffer makes her choice all right, the novel is her way of choosing, in its process, but she knows what has been let go, and that kind of relenting, that forgiveness is the memorable thing about *Falling,* the modest victory which deserves more than a modest salute — it deserves the experience it affords, remembering that the word *experience* and the word *peril* sprout into consciousness from the same root.

Richard Howard

THE ENCOUNTER CULTURE

ENCOUNTER GROUPS: FIRST FACTS. By Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles. Basic Books. $15.00.

By now everyone knows, as Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles inform us, that "encounter groups are an antidote to alienation, a modern revival without the deity, fun and games for adults who cannot play without a token offering to the Protestant ethic, an inexpensive form of psychotherapy for the masses, a Communist plot to undermine American morals, a way out of the havoc of the industrial revolution." Only a blend of ideology and instant therapy could possibly be thought of as

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representing so many things. But this is a recent development. While encounter practices and rhetoric now permeate every aspect of our cultural and political life, the aims of the first encounter groups in the 1950s — to study interaction, leadership solidarity, and coalitions in small groups and to heighten sensitivity to co-workers and racial minorities — have for the most part been forgotten. Ironically, as encounter competed more and more with psychotherapy in its claim to mental healing, the distinctions between mental health and illness became increasingly blurred — in step with the *Zeitgeist*.

Initially these groups purported to "make healthy people develop their human potentials," in contrast to psychoanalysis which perceives mental illness as the manifestation of inner conflict, and hence of conflict with society. The conflict between the instinctual life and the pressures of civilization, which according to Marcuse was toned down by the revisionists, was now not only ignored but was declared irrelevant. Obviously the psychoanalysts' sheer existence, their developing body of knowledge based on introspection and psychoanalytic techniques, in itself was a challenge to all T-groups, "humanistic psychology," and group therapy. With the establishment of Esalen, its flamboyantly-advertised emphasis on "feeling" through confrontations, confessions, catharsis in the present, body-cult, role-playing, and the development of strategies and games, all resemblance between psychotherapy and T-groups or encounter groups disappeared. Personal "conversion" by the "charismatic" psychoanalyst Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, who counseled that you lose your mind and follow your senses, act out feelings and forget the intellect, put the movement beyond the pale of classical analysis. Thus since the early 1960s encounter protagonists not only created an army of disciples, but frequently sold the new movement to the public by knocking psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. And each new variation on the original theme, in order to establish itself, invariably constructed its own ideology — an ideology, however, that is linked to the antitraditionalism of the counterculture; indeed the foolishness of both lends each other legitimation, support, and numerical strength. And their "wedding" has prepared the soil for all sorts of experimental groups, with all kinds of maverick group leaders out to "do their thing."

Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles conducted a mammoth inquiry into encounter groups in order to sort facts from fiction, results from failures, good leaders from bad, and positive personality changes from negative ones or from no changes at all. They discarded reporting by encounter "graduates" as too unreliable, too subjective and decided to start from

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scratch by attaching their study to a three-credit course on "Race and Prejudice" at Stanford University. They registered about 180 students and carefully selected sixteen of the best-trained group leaders, representing Gestalt, T-groups, Synanon, Esalen, psychodrama, transactional analysis, and leaderless therapy (a recording provides leadership). But the trouble with the study is that the encounter under arranged circumstances and for academic credit — despite a randomly selected control group of other students — left out other motivations, like looking for marriage or sex, for example; and the leaders were obviously not called upon to act as marriage brokers, as they might have been in ordinary encounter groups. We presume that fewer affairs, broken hearts, "deviant" relations, ill effects, and failures occurred in the classroom than in groups drawn from the general population. Anyway, no appreciably different results between the encounterers and the control group were found. Only 14 percent of the participants thought that significant "positive" change had occurred, while 16 percent expressed "negative" change. Overall evaluations indicated that 57 percent experienced mild "positive" results, 29 percent "neutral" ones, and 14 percent "negative" ones; and after six months mildly "positive" evaluations dropped to 46 percent, while "neutral" ones rose to 32 percent, and "negative" ones to 21 percent.

All these statistics are valuable for pointing out encounter's false claims. But the study's "scientism" and academicism which give the appearance of bringing order into chaos, of making sense out of much nonsense, by its very existence itself legitimates the encounter movement's presence and gives it respectability.

In the beginning, the encounter movement presumed to be the panacea for all personal and social ailments and promised instant recovery from depression, dealienation, involvement, better understanding, selfhood, "person-hood," a new personality or the revamping of the existing one, rebirth or the ability to be "free," justification for egotism, for self-assertion or self-expression. The original financial support for research about group learning by the government and foundations not only created a new lucrative profession which attracted persons from academe, public relations, encounter participation, and psychiatry, but supplied its seal of approval.

The pseudoscientific tone of the study also skirts the question of sexual encounters and thus neither affirms nor denies the rumors about orgies and experiments. Some groups encourage hugging, kissing, and touching, others go in for body movements and sensations. But the

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goal is always "feeling good," whether through games or anger or role-playing of one kind or another. And it is all in the name of freedom — spontaneity, the indulgence of feeling, the raising of consciousness — by which is meant the cultivation of one's desires. This is not the first time that freedom has been confused with permissiveness, but it may be the first time that actual harm to the psyche, such as breakdowns and suicides, is justified in the name of therapy. (Bruce Maliver elaborates this aspect in *The Encounter Game.*)

Encounter is now more than therapy; it is the new formula for liberation and fulfillment, the new psychological religion. Its jargon and attitudes — humanism, sharing, letting it hang out, expression of feeling, doing one's thing — pervade our culture today. For example, a Watergate defendant recently testified to having "shared" his experience with a trusted lawyer friend; a few years ago, he would have "asked for advice" or "dumped" his problem. Thus Daniel Bell in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* is able to state that "what is central to the relationship [of work] is encounter or communication. . . . [and] individuals now interact with other individuals rather than interact with a machine . . . in the post-industrial society." He assumes encounter to be a social good because it has become the norm. And as such it is accepted by him and by everybody else, and what is being communicated or shared remains unimportant. As a result, the moral implications of encounter are blurred. For the assumption of encounter that flouting puritan morality automatically releases the moral life is at the center of our moral predicament.

Furthermore, the idea of sharing reinforces our populist myths. And the smorgasbord of anti-elitism, counterculture styles, and democratic and pseudodemocratic practices are claimed even to have revolutionary force. But anyone who stops to think realizes, of course, that revolutionary leaders — for better or for worse — far from encouraging self-expression advocated self-discipline and self-negation, both in the name of the cause and for ultimate personal liberation. In any case, the myth of antielitism helps no one; it removes the elite's visibility but does not impede in any way the exercise of power.

The combination of encounter rhetoric with the movement's professed anti-intellectualism creates an "expressive" philosophy of the present, where feeling replaces thinking and where self-indulgence becomes a cultural ideal. Experience is transformed into a social and personal value and acquires a moral aura. Thus encounter turns into a communal religion as the group is converted to a tribe: ritual confes-

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sions and the giving and withdrawing of love to strangers are believed to lead to personal salvation, while ceremonial and orgiastic experiences build social cohesion and community spirit.

Obviously the encounter movement must reject Freud, as though the act of proclaiming his death automatically assures the life of any new therapy. Still some of the more enterprising psychoanalysts cash in on the prestige of analysis by translating Freud into encounter language (i.e., Acceptor and Rejector are more palatable terms for mass consumption than Masochist and Sadist). Encounter is also, ironically, stimulated by the very success of analysis that has led to its popularization and vulgarization and has left the public unable even to differentiate between rival forms of quackery. Furthermore, the recognition that psychoanalysis is no cure-all, the naive application of psychoanalysis to social and political problems, the secrecy of the analytic process, occasional malpractice by a few, the public's search for "painless" therapies, and its confusion of abreaction with cure, all have contributed to the fact that criticism of psychoanalysis is currently quite fashionable. And to add to the confusion, the popular success of encounter has led a number of analysts to borrow or adapt some encounter techniques, which further legitimates encounter and serves to blur basic differences.

Encounter also thrives on the misunderstanding of the "privacy" of analysis and on the common notion that having things out openly, publicly, is not only more honest but has a cleansing effect on the psyche. What the propagandists for encounter overlook is that privacy is not only a matter of aesthetic preference, but makes for the trust and professionalism of the relation between analyst and patient and for the very delicate process of transference.

But the very denial of the idea of the unconscious and of transference by most of the encounterers is the secret of its success. Thus the spectacular development of encounter language and customs places it high among current growth industries. In a way, the phenomenon is similar to the original dissemination of psychoanalysis in America: the avidity for the novel, for its popular and pragmatic application, and for the belief in instant cure — be it by the faith healer, fortune teller, or patent medicine man — have always been part of the American scene.

Yet while *Encounter Groups: First Facts* exposes some of the encounter movement's exaggerated claims, it doesn't account for its pervasive presence in our society. The influence of the mass media, the fusion of professional and popular culture, consumerism, a shift in mental disorders (such as the disappearance of hysteria and the ap-

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pearance of more obsessive-compulsive disturbances and more of the so-called structural and ego disorders), rising expectations for self-fulfillment and happiness by more people — all these things have sold encounter as the bargain basement version of psychoanalysis.

Superficially, it is true that encounter at first reduces the loneliness, alienation, and unhappiness that comes from the fragmentation of modern life. Clearly, the encounter movement's appeal to self-consciousness — itself a sign of some personal success and of middle-class status — enhances the participant's idea of himself. But his ego-trip, through the cycle of "love" and hostility with his fellow encounterers, is confused with genuine intimacy. On this personal level encounter is responsible for the increasing spread of what Marcuse calls "repressive desublimation." For the naïveté and idealism of the encounterers lend themselves to manipulation by many encounter leaders, who under the aegis of participatory democracy, actually exercise considerable power.

In the end, encounter's facile theories serve to fudge the complex question of rights and obligations (the latter are increasingly ignored) of personal freedom and social restrictions. Civilization and its discontents are back in the discussions, but now they are no longer problems to be faced — they are experiences to be felt.

Edith Kurzweil

V-2

GRAVITY'S RAINBOW. By Thomas Pynchon. Viking. $15.00; paper $4.95.

Several months after the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow,* the book having disappeared quickly from its unnatural position on the best seller list, and the renewed excitement about the mystery of Pynchon having subsided, it is still difficult to talk rationally about Pynchon's work. A measure of intellectual machismo these days is the number of pages of *Gravity's Rainbow* one has been able to read, the number of puns and literary games one has been able to detect. The book is, as almost everyone knows by now, an exceptionally difficult one. It makes *V.,* Pynchon's massive and brilliant first novel, look like a two-finger exercise, a model of simplicity and clarity. Still giddy from three months of reading through it, I want to confess at the outset to re-

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maining awestruck, to being convinced that Pynchon has become the most important American novelist now writing.

But it's not comforting committing oneself to Pynchon's writing, and his critics and reviewers are bound to have a hard time. The discomfort comes not because he knows so much about technology, popular culture, history, and the street, nor because he creates long sequences of perverse and nauseating intensity, but because his writing challenges fundamental, usually unspoken literary and cultural assumptions. The assumption, for example, that order and unity are intrinsically valuable, that characters and objects are unequivocally distinguishable, that vulgarity and obscenity and what are conventionally called "cheap jokes" may be used but not taken on their own terms, that there are clear demarcations between fantasy and reality, between the physical and the metaphysical, that man's fate is in man's hands, and, perhaps, that there is such a thing as freedom. Perhaps most disturbing, these challenges are playful, implied frequently with the kind of deliberate banality or comedy that makes such solemn formulations as mine seem inappropriate.

No writer I know of is more resistant to form, nor more sensitive to it. *The Crying of Lot 49* finds a shape for the chaotic energies Pynchon first released in *V*. It gives us a central character, Oedipa Maas, a central plot, a single paranoia, and a predominant paranoid question: is Oedipa paranoid or is the plot she discovers real. But chaos is a constant presence, both as a threat to Oedipa and to the form of the book, and as the conspiracy closes in through the last pages, chaos beckons almost as a consolation. In *Gravity's Rainbow* chaos is (if it's imaginable) the center, not the periphery. Perhaps there is a central character — Slothrop, the conditioned paranoid New Englander whose sexuality is attuned to the rocket for which everybody is searching. But Slothrop literally dissolves as a character in a world of hundreds of characters, thousand of objects, each with its own story, its own paranoia. Even a bulb named Byron has his story, his plot. The plot, too, has an apparent center, the quest for the mysterious rocket 00000 and for the Schwarz-gerät which allows it to defy gravity. But nobody, including the inventors of its parts, seems to know how it is put together, and the stories that appear to circle around it pull out of its gravitational attraction.

Paranoia allows plot — is plot. But to carry the pun that far is to turn narrative into madness. This was part of the game in *V.*, but here the parody of the plotted novel is already old hat and rather too com-

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forting since parody gives us the old form to hang on to. The choice between paronoia and chaos, between Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane of *V.*, is further complicated here. Slothrop, the novel's rough equivalent to Profane, shares without understanding it an obsession like Stencil's. But his paranoia is justified by the facts — or almost. He struggles with the Stencil-Profane qualities in himself, and as he simultaneously recognizes and resists paranoia, he becomes less and less a self to be contended with. The primary focus of the reader's narrative concern through the center of the book, Slothrop attracts to his rescue several of the other major characters — particularly Katje Borgesius (a cross between Lucrecia and Borges) and Pirate Prentice (the psychic who takes over other people's perceptions); and he is the focus of a plot by Ned Pointsman (the master Pavlovian) which ends in the mistaken castration of Major Marvy. Yet the Slothrop plot is not resolved, or even unresolved. Like Slothrop, it simply dissolves in the antiparanoid condition of chaos. At one point, the rather obscure multivoiced narrator alludes to the two aspects of Slothrop: "If there is something comforting — religious, if you want — about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long. Well right now Slothrop feels himself sliding into the anti-paranoid part of his cycle, feels the whole city around him going back roofless, vulnerable, uncentered as he is, and only pasteboard images now of the listening Enemy left between him and the wet sky. Either they have put him here for a reason, or he's just here. He isn't sure that he wouldn't, actually, rather have that *reason.*"

I'd prefer a reason, too. Somebody, somewhere, must have a reason for something. Or, in the tradition of naturalistic fiction in which nature brooded indifferently over the fates of heroes and heroines, at least the strength and the suffering of the protagonist could imply values brought by man into the indifferent world. But here people become objects, aspects of that very indifferent world they fear. Moreover, the indifferent world may not, after all, be indifferent, though it is surely unintelligible or translatable only into the formulas of mechanics. Yet it is impossible not to follow the clues Pynchon plants as he leads us on with symbols, allusions, suggestive images, repetitions. But the patterns are almost impossible to decode, or can be decoded as Weissman decoded the spherics in *V.*: "The world is everything that is the case." The curious pleasure that comes with recognition of such clues as that *Gravity's Rainbow* is about V-2 or that an orgy takes the shape of a

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snake with its tail in its mouth or that images of black and white pervade the action doesn't get one very far.

Form teases rather than satisfies. The book begins, for instance, with a line implicitly picked up at the end: "A screaming comes across the sky." On the last pages, a Los Angeles theater manager named Zhlubb hears a terrifying noise: " 'I don't think that's a police siren.' Your guts in a spasm, you reach for the AM radio. *'I don't think . . .'*." The noise, we have to assume, is the noise of a rocket (as it was on page one), except that you can't hear this kind of rocket until *after* it hits. And this is probably the rocket for which most of the major characters in the novel have been searching or living. Inside it is the lover (screaming?) of the rocket master — our old friend Weissman, by the way, code name Blicero. The rocket is about to hit a movie theater where we are apparently sitting watching a film which might well be called *Gravity's Rainbow*. We have, in good old literary style, come full circle, the narrative resolved, except that we are now participating in an ultimate, shaping paranoid vision into which Pynchon has been inducing us — destroyed if we accept it, dissolved if we don't. The shape seems to be there, but the more seriously we look for it, the less convincing it is.

As with *V.*, critics will be busy organizing this book's extraordinary incoherence for a long time. But the felt experience of the book for me runs counter to my passion to organize it. It is a book of moments wonderfully, satisfyingly realized by Pynchon. The connections are mine. As we move to the last chapters and the characters seem to be approaching their objects, the prose and the narrative fragment even more violently, more recklessly. If some things are pulled together, more fall apart. Zhlubb, for instance, is an entirely new character, appearing only on the last six pages. The last chapters are broken into titled fragments, and each of the fragments seems itself to fall apart. Insofar as we demand order here, we become either *"We,"* the preterite, the passed over, the victims of the destructive human systems which have led to the dominance of technology, the dehumanization of human beings and their relations, and mass slaughters (Indians, Khirgis, Dodos, dogs, Jews, and Hereros are among the mass-slaughtered here), or *"They,"* the dehumanizers. The scenario is that of a horror movie, and Dracula is a presiding figure. As Father Rapier says to the damned double agents gathered in a museum which seems an early hell: "We have to carry on under the possibility that we die *only* because They want us to: be-

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cause They need our terror for their Survival. We are their harvests."

To play the critic's game with Pynchon is not only to read but to participate in his scenario. That is, we become either the manipulated We to his uncannily ingenious They (which, I think, is part of his fun as it might be part of ours), or, more solemnly, play They to the We of multifarious and discontinuous experience. Obviously, there's no way to escape participation in the game. We should play it carefully.

The book describes a world of unintelligible and unintelligent energies, a world in which the primary fact is not thought or feeling or belief but energy itself. The energy is so potent (manifest in the imagined world and Pynchon's own prose) that it crosses the barrier between matter and spirit (and that barrier, that "interface," as Pynchon calls it, is a presiding preoccupation of the book): naturalism becomes spiritualism, and seances, emanations and mystical visions become as commonplace as technology and orgies. As the energy builds, sweeping cartels, people, light bulbs, rockets, sex, races, films, dope, technology in its path, it moves beyond the control of any elements that participate in it. A critical mass develops, a mass to be celebrated because it can't be contravened: "Critical mass cannot be ignored. Once the technical means of control have reached a certain size, a certain degree of *being connected* one to another, the chances for freedom are over for good." The world, this book, are beyond return, beyond freedom. Technology is assimilated to theology, and the mass to be celebrated is connected with both Catholic and Calvinist ritual, though it may be a black mass.

Energy creates the same kind of mystique of objects that we find in *V.*, though here it is carried even further. Although humans may be transformed into objects (as V herself came apart like a bad joke), objects themselves are alive, full of a significance we can't quite comprehend but we can feel. Pynchon's language is itself full of this kind of energy, and through it he assimilates the world of science fiction and horror movies to the texture of our own culture. In both worlds, objects have assumed an importance larger than human, have, like Dracula, made slaves and automatons of people who do not believe in his power or believe too late. Their human energy is transformed into inhuman energy in an act which simulates love. And of course our society is driven (it would seem now uncontrollably) by a passion for production and possession, driven in a way which finally wrests power from humans and invests it in things. A consumer culture loves its possessions, lives for them, is ultimately transformed by them.

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Partly as a consequence of this sense of the power of objects, one of the important aspects of Pynchon's style is the catalogue: the reverent, uncannily precise notation of things. Echoing and parodying the traditions of naturalism, Pynchon describes objects not with the planned banality of the writer determined to capture the "real," but with a vision that the real is really a kind of science fiction, that the ordinary is electric, alive, threatening, in process. To take a minor but characteristic example, here is a description of Slothrop's desk, which

> hasn't been cleaned down to the original wood since 1942. Things have fallen roughly into layers, over a base of bureaucratic smegma that sifts steadily to the bottom, made up of millions of tiny red and brown curls of rubber eraser, pencil shavings, dried tea or coffee stains, traces of sugar and Household Milk, much cigarette ash, very fine black debris picked and flung from typewriter ribbons, decomposing library paste, broken aspirins ground to powder. Then comes a scatter of paperclips, Zippo flints, rubber bands, staples, cigarette butts and crumpled packs, stray matches, pins, nubs of pens, stubs of pencils of all colors including the hard to get heliotrope and raw umber, wooden coffee spoons, Thayer's Slippery Elm Throat Lozenges sent by Slothrop's mother, Naline, all the way from Massachusetts, bits of tape, string, chalk . . . above that a layer of memoranda, empty buff ration books, phone numbers, unanswered letters, tattered sheets of carbon paper, the scribbled ukulele chords to a dozen songs including "Johnny Doughboy Found a Rose in Ireland" . . ., an empty Kreml hair tonic bottle, lost pieces to different jigsaw puzzles showing parts of the amber left eye of a Weimaraner, the green velvet folds of a gown, slate blue veining in a distant cloud, the orange nimbus of an explosion (perhaps a sunset), rivets in the skin of a Flying Fortress, the pink inner thigh of a pouting pin-up girl . . . a few old weekly Intelligence Summaries from G-2, a busted corkscrewing ukulele string, boxes of gummed paper stars in many colors, pieces of a flashlight, top to a Nugget shoe polish can in which Slothrop now and then studies his blurry brass reflection, any number of reference books out of ACHTUNG library back down the hall — a dictionary of technical German, an F.D. *Special Handbook* or *Town Plan* — and usually, unless it's been pinched or thrown away, a *News of the World* somewhere too — Slothrop's a faithful reader.

Obviously, this goes on longer than it has to, except that it is fun and, like so many other catalogues throughout the novel, it is not "background." Although it implies enough connections so that we are obliged to bring to bear some of our conventional sense of how descriptions like this work in conventional novels — after all, isn't this really about Slothrop — in fact the passage is about itself.

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The catalogue describes objects alive and in motion, no deader than the earth in its large geological movements, nor than consuming and waste-producing organisms. It implies a whole world and culture and *is* a world and a culture, pointlessly alive, described with the uncanny precision of a mad scientist. The products that constitute the world have been transformed into semisexual waste. Almost everything is empty or used: shoe polish tins, hair tonic bottles, cigarette packs, ukulele strings, eraser rubbings, ration books. Sexuality, waste, bureaucracy smudge together in the various strata, while humans turn to brass, machines have skin, clouds have veins, and sunsets and explosions have become indistinguishable.

And, since this is Pynchon, one looks for the implicit connections. Sure enough, there are plenty of them: not only the stars Slothrop uses to pinpoint his sexual exploits (which also mark the hits of the German V-2), the "orange nimbus of an explosion," the piece of a dog calling to mind the dog hunts that Pointsman and his Pavlovians conduct, the dictionary of technical German whose language permeates the rocket sections. And then, inescapably, there is the puzzle, the pieces of incoherent experience making no sense but implying larger worlds, equivalent to the passage itself in its fragmentariness, its suggestion of a whole Slothrop (whom we never quite put together before he blurs away and dissolves). But all of this goes on in a world historically authentic. The products are of their time. Note that the spoons are wooden, not plastic, the flints and the hair tonic are rightly named, the pinups perfectly characterized, and so on.

The surfaces which occupy so much space in *Gravity's Rainbow* accumulate, puzzlingly, discontinuously, as here, sometimes comically, sometimes grotesquely, sometimes with a technically dispassionate precision which can be terrifying. Nothing disappears from this world, but everything is transformed, like the cigarette in ashes, the eraser in curls, the ribbon in flecks. The presiding power is energy itself, gradually leveling human experience and feeling into geological strata. We're warned that physics will become metaphysics in the epigraph to the first book, which would be unequivocally serious if it weren't from a real rocket master, Wernher von Braun. "Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation. Everything science has taught me and continues to teach me, strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death." But how, in the midst of these wonderfully recorded objects undergoing their inexplicable transformation can one be, as one of Pynchon's characters explicitly wishes, "simply here, simply alive."

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The energies of transformation affect everyone, even the apparently evil spirits whose capacity to feel anything but the need to feel has died and has led them to drain the life from all around them. Katje Borgesius, the witch, shares the pain of her victims; Weissman-Blicero loses all of his last three lovers; Pointsman is disgraced and cannot even catch his most interesting experiment, Slothrop. Webley Silvernail — a "guest star" — wandering among the Pavlovian cages, speculates: "All the animals, the plants, the minerals, even other kinds of men, are being broken and reassembled every day, to preserve an elite few, who are the loudest to theorize on freedom, but the least free of all." Here is the Dracula metaphor again, though with the new consciousness that Dracula, too, is a slave. What is there left to worship, or fear. Father Rapier has noted that the "critical mass" is too great, and Franz Pökler finally speaks, "In the name of the cathode, the anode, and the holy grid." The objects, the released energy, are out of control. Once the zero point is crossed, there is no return, and the rocket submits to gravity: "All the rest will happen according to the laws of ballistics. The rocket is helpless in it. Something else has taken over. Something beyond what has been designed in." And that is true of Pynchon's book, as Pynchon knows. We cannot redeem it for order or assimilate it to our conventional modes of control.

The analogue to this in Pynchon's style is its refusal of outrage, its dispassion in the face of the perversions, monstrosities, dehumanizations it chronicles. As narrator, he almost finds a way to be "simply here," and not to flinch. But not to flinch in such a context is almost intolerable, and to make bad jokes along the way is to encourage the kind of protests about inhumanity that Pynchon regularly gets. The wonderful bad pun on Hobbes in the law firm of Salitieri, Poore, Nash, De Brutus, and Short, is borderline. But the terrible limericks, the awful pop songs — authentic in their awfulness — the accumulated obscenities, the grotesque post-Dickensian names (e.g., General Pudding, Osbie Feel, Rollo Groast, Teddy Bloat, Blodgett Waxwing, Micro Graham, Geli Tripping, "Merciful" Evans, Jessica Swanlake) must be taken entirely on their own gross terms before we even begin to try to redeem them with literary critical cunning. Pynchon knows we laugh at this sort of stuff when we're not being literary, and when we do here we begin to feel some of the respect for the nonliterary which makes Pynchon so hard to swallow and so special.

As he has assimilated and transmuted so much in American culture, so he has assimilated American literature as well. He pushes the Whit-

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manesque dream of total acceptance and total democracy so that we can begin to feel some of its potential non-Whitmanesque terrors. Yet he also participates, perhaps perversely, in that dream. Pynchon has been accused of lack of feeling (one thinks of Esther's nose job in *V.*, or Major Marvy's castration here), but his prose is implicitly full of respect for what is, and of awe, and of love. It is not merely, here, in the treatment of Roger Mexico's love of Jessica, which has some of the quality of sentimental romance. But in Slothrop's (and Pynchon's) affection for the preadolescent Bianca, Pökler's for his daughter Ilse, though both relationships are consummated in what would seem to be very unsentimental fucking. Worse — or better — it is even in the gold droplets of urine on Katje's pubic hairs which General Pudding passionately licks. It is in the perversions, the sodomies, the orgies, the rockets, the Dodo birds, and banana sandwiches. Only a writer who cares can see with Pynchon's intensity and range, can remember with such vividness, can juxtapose so recklessly and creatively.

Pynchon makes everything, even monstrosity, imaginable, and in doing so he has forced his art to catch up with the possibilities of feeling and action in our own times, to register them, to transcend them. He understands, especially, the peculiarly modern experience of being victimized into victimizing, of being forced to submit to anonymous energies in bureaucracies and computers and machines while becoming oneself an element in that energy. But even in simple conventional terms of realistic correspondence to the actual present, *Gravity's Rainbow* is a remarkable achievement. Pynchon, surely, invented Watergate and named its characters: Haldeman (dead-heap man), Ehrlichman (nobleman), Kalmbach (quiet stream — still waters run deep, you know). It was his idea to give them German names. And who else would have provided a secretary named Harmony, a group called "the Plumbers" with its star Egil Krogh (Eagle Crow) and its comically bewigged spy named Hunt. Pynchon planted the sense of conspiracy and the actual discontinuities, irrationalities, incoherences, as well as the passionate faith of the doomed young subordinates. *Gravity's Rainbow* is full, too, of plots of big businesses larger than nations — Shell, I. G. Farben, for example. He knows that it's not Nixon but I.T.T. or Vesco's oil companies which are the real source of energy and power. And he knows that a man like Vesco can buy a country like Costa Rica. The fantasies, the parodies of science fiction movies, are part of the feeling texture of our present moment.

In making his own the central motifs of American literature and

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by subjecting them to the questions that our nonliterary culture forcibly implies, Pynchon has created a great historical novel, a great fantasy, a great parody. But more than that, he has found a potentially liberating literary mode. By making us wallow in our fantasies, our products, our bad jokes that we use to help redeem us from our numbness, he severs our connection with any of the mythologies which have contributed to our dehumanization, our transformation of people into objects. In *V.*, we watched how our myths, when acted out, not only removed us from the particularities of our own lives, but helped us to reduce those who didn't fit the myths to objects. Mass slaughter (we call it genocide these days) was one of the consequences.

Pynchon takes the post-Romantic exhaustion of feeling for granted and deals with the quest for new feeling. Death and sexual perversion (in which the lover becomes object) are other consequences. In *Gravity's Rainbow,* the Hereros of *V.* reappear as the Schwarzkommandos, participating like their white master in the pursuit of the ultimate energy — where sex and death come together — in the V-2. But the Hereros are now "The Empty Ones," deracinated, homeless, whose fulfillment can come only with death, and whose true object is suicide. Colonialism comes back to haunt the white masters, and the fantasy of Black violence (King Kong, along with Dracula, may well be the star of the show) pervades the book. The potentiality for annihilation now is total, and the Blacks and whites, colonials and colonists, are brothers, as the star Black, Enzian, is the brother of one of the star whites, Tchitcherine, a Russian rocket man and paranoid, whose body is full of metal plates and who seeks to destroy his brother.

Literary and myth detectives will, clearly, have a picnic. Faulkner, Melville, Conrad, Lawrence, Borges, Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Malcolm X (not to mention Cole Porter, Superman, Frankenstein, Dracula, King Kong, "Have Gun Will Travel," Mickey Rooney, Clerk Maxwell, President Truman) are all presences here. Ahab sought the whale, McCaslin sought the bear, Slothrop seeks the rocket. Women are mysterious and untrustworthy and all-absorbing. Blacks are the occasion for guilt, violence, hatred, sexual fear. We have the conjunction of sex and death, the Puritan doctrine of the elect and the preterite, the reverence for power, the mutual love of men (both homosexual and straight), the attempted murder of the brother and the son, the American innocent in a duplicitous and morally exhausted Europe — except that America is morally exhausted, too. This catalogue can go on, and each item in it is both parodied and developed seriously.

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But all of these myths appear in the context of popular and non-literary culture, and as many critics have already noted, the predominant art influence is that of the film. All these myths appear in the frames of motion pictures so that we are at once entertained, engaged, and conscious of the potential artificiality. Films are collections of still photographs which create the illusion of movement and continuity. But they are rather like the coins in the Borges parable in his story "Tlön, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius." That is, the coins lost yesterday and found today need not be the same. The picture in frame one is not the picture in frame two. Their connection is an illusion created by motion and electric energy. Thus the film creates in popular form the great American myths. Pynchon takes them as he finds them and pushes them at least one step beyond. Everywhere he takes enormous risks of banality or vulgarity (on the model of the motion picture) because he is unafraid to act out the fantasies of fear, of racial madness, of power, which are the staple of our popular media. He makes them both fantastic and felt reality.

The only American myth that survives is the anti-myth of Henry Adams. Adams is a presence in *V.* In *Gravity's Rainbow,* Pynchon has found a way to embody his anarchic vision. *The Education of Henry Adams* can, in fact, provide much of that gloss on the book that desperate literary seekers after coherence will be looking for, but the gloss cannot be comforting since it is an affirmation of incoherence. Here, for example, is Adams, not Pynchon:

> The sum of forces attracts; the feeble atom or molecule called man is attracted; he suffers education or growth; he is the sum of the forces that attract him; his body and his thought are alike the product; the movement of the forces controls the progress of the mind, since he can know nothing but the motions which impinge on his senses, whose sum makes education.

The technology, the preoccupation with Pavlovian conditioning, the persistent reduction of people to natural forces — all of these in Pynchon echo Adams's way of thinking. So too does the sense that the energy being produced by the world is being doubled every ten years (as Adams says), or is moving out of control (as Pynchon implies). In any case, Adams shares the view that the energy moves man into "a supersensual world, in which he could measure nothing except by chance collisions of movements imperceptible to his sense, perhaps even imperceptible to his instruments, but perceptible to each other and so to

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some known ray at the end of the scale . . . — physics stark mad in metaphysics." The old myth of unity is dissolved. What remains for Adams as for Pynchon is energy, the irrational, unintelligible experience, particulars.

The "anti-paranoid" myth is the greatest risk Pynchon runs as a writer because formally it means Slothrop's fate, that is, dissolution. Parody can protect him from formlessness but not from the energies released by the destruction of old forms, by the accumulation of incoherent particulars which might relate in any of a thousand ways — and might not. Pynchon leaves it all open, disturbingly. And in the process he plays games with relationships. Metaphor is the key here. In *V.*, Fausto Maistral, the Maltese poet, talks about how metaphor "is a device, an artifice. So that while others may look on the laws of physics as legislation and God as a human form with beard [the poet is alone] living a universe of things which simply are." Yet no one is more convincing than Pynchon in the invention of metaphors which force us to the equation of meaning with paranoia. As in *V.*, for example, *Gravity's Rainbow* gives us a letter — *s* — to worry over. Each *s* brings to mind the Schwarz-gerät which allows the V-2 rocket to defy gravity; Slothrop; the German SS; the shape of two lovers lying together; the shape of the tunnels in the rocket center at Nordhausen, which is based on the double lightning stroke and the sign of the double integral, and the "double integrating circuit in the guidance system of the rocket," u.s.w., until the snake's tail is in his mouth, and the violent energy expended doubles back on itself entropically reducing and homogenizing all elements. *S* is, of course, a double parabola, and the parabola, marking the flight of the rocket, is the shape of gravity's rainbow itself. Moreover, the upper arch of the parabola marks the interface between control and submission, the point where the energy and control of the Schwarz-gerät surrenders to "ballistics." But Pynchon can assimilate all this to the action of his characters, to the movement of his plots, and to his sense of the shape of Western culture. The arch of that parabola came, in this mythology, in the First World War:

> an English class was being decimated, the ones who'd volunteered were dying for those who'd known something and hadn't, and despite all, despite knowing, some of them, of the betrayal, while Europe died meanly in its own wastes, man loved. But the life-cry of that love has long since hissed away into no more than this idle and bitchy faggotry. In this latest War, death was no enemy, but a collaborator. Homosexuality in high places is just a carnal afterthought now, and the real and only fucking is done on paper.

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One way to think of Pynchon's style in the context of this meaningless, dehumanized universe, is suggested in the book itself. Pynchon may seem to be describing, even celebrating, the death of a culture. But his style and language are the signs of life, not death. In a passage which might be taken as a metaphor for his own writing, Pynchon gives us a characteristically vulgar and authentic boogie-woogie song called "Sold on Suicide." Like the poetry of the Whole Sick Crew in *V.*, it is full of proper nouns. "In its complete version," the narrator says,

> it represents a pretty fair renunciation of the things of the world. The trouble with it is that by Gödel's theorem there is bound to be some item that one has omitted from the list, and such an item is not easy to think of off the top of one's head, so that what one does most likely is go back over the whole thing, meantime correcting mistakes and inevitable repetitions, and putting in new items that will surely have occurred to one, and — well, it's easy to see that the "suicide" of the title might have to be postponed indefinitely.

Gravity's Rainbow is a defense against suicide, not a celebration of it. Nobody in it really dies. Nobody exhausts reality or even the possibilities of myths of unity. Tchitcherine, employed to find a universal alphabet, fails in a kind of Tower of Babel. Though the world is driven by an anonymous energy which has seemed to deprive its inhabitants of the power of love, even the power of authentic life, that life is everywhere, "A face on ev'ry mountainside / And a Soul in ev'ry stone." Even Pynchon's style, as he knows, cannot exhaust everything in the suicidal catalogue, but the catalogue itself is a vital achievement. The style, denying and asserting connection, creating metaphors, being "simply here," becomes the real possibility of freedom. It challenges us to take the risk of letting ourselves loose from the destructive myths which support us, and to face, with Pynchonian confidence and authority, an irrational world of objects.

George Levine

THE DESTRUCTIVE ELEMENT

THE EDGE OF IMPOSSIBILITY. By Joyce Carol Oates. Vanguard. $8.50.

THE STRANGER IN SHAKESPEARE. By Leslie Fiedler. Stein and Day. $7.95.

Both these books are concerned with the boundaries of art and the self, and with the forces that beckon and threaten from beyond those boundaries — destructive forces whose energy is an ultimate source

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of art. A work of literature, for both Fiedler and Oates, is an arena where self wrestles with other, and if for Fiedler the other always takes on some grotesque image of the human, for Oates the image is more like chaos itself. She is particularly concerned with what she calls, in her essay on Mann's *Dr. Faustus,* "terminal works," works that exhaust their genre, that press toward what is impossible for art, that carry out their projects in a world so real that it gives back no reflection of a human image — or reflects human activity only to the extent that humanity participates in the destructive chaos that constitutes reality. These are works in short that strike through the masks, to touch — as she argues Melville himself touches — the nihilism at the base of things. She summarizes her concern in her introduction:

> Art is built around violence, around death; at its base is fear. The absolute dream, if dreamed, must deal with death, and the only way toward death we understand is the way of violence. In the various works examined in this collection of essays, as well as in *Hamlet,* nihilism is overcome by the breaking down of the dikes between human beings, the flowing forth of passion.

But the victory over nihilism is not absolute; indeed in most of the work which she discusses the nihilistic base of reality is not so much overcome as daringly acknowledged. By somehow riding the violence from within, the artist imposes a liberating illusion on the violence from without, on that otherness which she conceives of finally as empty of meaning, a nothingness. "Being," she concludes in the last paragraph of the book, "is an empty fiction."

I suppose that in a sense her book is about what a *full* fiction should be, and that she would agree with Nietzsche that art is a metaphysical supplement to life. One offers such conclusions with a degree of uncertainty, however, because though the relation between art and nihilism is a recurring theme in the book, it is not treated as a source for developing argument. It remains, rather, simply a point to which the individual essays tend. This is regrettable, for the propositions put forward in the introduction deserve — and in fact need — the test of development at length. Perhaps Oates should not be faulted for what she has not undertaken to do, and while the dense assertions of the introduction lead us to expect a more unified work than we get, the book does not elsewhere behave as if it promised an argument, as if it were, in fact, more than a collection of essays.

These, it should be said at once, are admirable. They are expert,

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judicious, stimulating, carefully meditated. Few American novelists — or poets for that matter — could be counted on to do so well on such a variety of subjects. The essays on *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra* are sensitively balanced where criticism is usually one-sided. The chapter on Chekhov and "absurdist" drama is full of acute distinctions and comparisons. Oates is particularly good on the taunting puzzles and contradictions in Yeats's poetry — as opposed to the grand antinomies both Yeats and his critics so much prefer to contemplate — and she is very alert to the way in which the line-by-line excitements of his verse regularly subvert the meanings they ostensibly enforce.

But this is not the place to expand on the virtues of the individual chapters, or to argue with their local observations. The interest of the separate essays is overshadowed — whether the author intends it or not — by the book's larger theme. We will certainly understand Oates's direction as a novelist better if we read her criticism carefully, and the standard of care I would suggest is this — we should be able, finally, to understand what she means by the rather terrible announcement in the introduction that "Violence is always an affirmation" — to understand it, that is, and not be repelled by it. For violence is an affirmation only when it is perceived as a last remedy against nihilism, a desperate grace. Oates's criticism makes clear that this is how she conceives of violence and its role in art, including, I would think, her own. This insight of course does not make her work in fiction any more successful than it already is, but it does make clearer and more interesting the fictional project her work undertakes, and which we can feel beginning to succeed in *Them* and *Wonderland*. My guess is that it will also make that project more significant for her readers; it has for me.

If the otherness peeping through the masks of art appears, in Oates, at times monotonously bleak, in Fiedler it seems almost to achieve the coziness of gossip. For him, the image of the other, no matter how deformed or dangerous, is always human, its face transfigured by our appetites. To strike through the mask is to reveal a secret self, a feared desire. The "stranger" of Fiedler's title is "that borderline figure, who defines the limits of the human — customarily from the farther side, though never without some ambiguity." His excellent introductory pages not only define a fascinating subject but invoke a salutary tact. "I have tried to write," he tells us, "not another book about 'Our Shakespeare' but one about 'Shakespeare's Us.'" It is a lovely formulation and sets a wholly appropriate goal for the mythological criticism he undertakes.

At its best his approach produces criticism that will be valued by

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any reader. I have in mind especially his discussion of what might be called the mytho-geography of *The Tempest,* where Fiedler concentrates on the play's curious, muted insistence on Africa — on Tunis and Argier. He sees Shakespeare as fusing the legendary boundaries of the European past (Carthage, Virgil, Greek romance, the East) with the magical boundaries of its imagined future (America, savages, the Bermuda pamphlets), and what he has to say is highly suggestive. Here, indeed — as with his discussion of the role of witches in early Shakespeare and of the recurrent Shakespearean figure of the man not born of woman — he allows us to glimpse a mythic pattern that is as deep in the plays as it is in our own psychic life. But if these may stand as examples of Shakespeare's Us, most of the rest of the book must regretfully be described as no more than Fiedler's Shakespeare.

The strangers he deals with include the Jew, the Moor, and the New World Savage, but they all resolve themselves very rapidly into the figure of the stranger as — woman. It is a legitimate subject to be sure, indeed a great one, but the subterranean way it asserts itself — for the book really has very little to say about Shylock, Othello, and Caliban — suggests an uneasiness of focus. And the mythic plum Fiedler pulls from the collected works turns out to be dismally familiar, the nineteenth-century homoerotic Shakespeare, in whose imagination an ideal boy is forever threatened by a witchlike Dark Lady, and for whom tragic life is simply that old *vagina dentata* closing in. Now this motif *is* present and important in Shakespeare — as it is present and important, for example, in the collected criticism of Leslie Fiedler. What *The Stranger in Shakespeare* never seems to acknowledge is that Shakespeare is quite as alert as Fiedler to the type of sexual evasion that, say, "Come Back to the Raft, Huck Honey" dramatizes, and that the figure of the narcissistic young man in Shakespeare is never presented without irony. Sexual withdrawal in Shakespeare is invariably challenged and criticized by dramatic encounter. The closed-off adolescent who in the sonnets and *Venus and Adonis* is both threatened and tested by the presence of a lustful female, is forced in the comedies and *Romeo and Juliet* to open himself to a greater realism and vitality, represented by a mature or maturing woman. The self-possessed and risk-taking heroines of the early plays lead their men out into a world of danger and commitment, which Shakespeare associates with wisdom, pleasure, and significant action. This is one of Shakespeare's major patterns; enlarged and transformed, it will shape the careers of most of his tragic heroes as well.

But for Fiedler the comedies (and, as far as I can gather, most of Shakespeare's plays except the romances) are a kind of bear pit where

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Adonises are tormented by witches — who usually are bought off or erased by a variety of duplicitous techniques. (Viola is played by — wow! — a boy.) At the end of *Love's Labor's Lost,* to take an example, the King of France's sudden death forces a postponement of the heroes' marriages. For Fiedler this is a projection of Shakespeare's sexual inhibitions, a last-ditch staving off of the witches. Shakespeare "cannot compel himself" to end the play in marriage. This ignores the whole pattern of the play, which begins, as Shakespeare so often does in this period, with a band of young men refusing full sexuality in favor of camaraderie. The play's action (and its laughter) forces them — again the pattern is typical — out of their narcissistic withdrawal and toward adult love. The ultimate step in the process requires an acceptance of the universe of death, and so the King dies, and the lovers must accept a probationary year — separate probations by the way; the old gang must be broken up. The highly mannered hunting-in-a-pack of adolescence and the highly mannered verbal style that accompanies it is to be replaced by a more demanding commitment and plainer speech. "To raise harsh laughter in the throat of death" will be a new task for Berowne — whose instincts are good but who has difficulty speaking plainly — but it is a respectable one for mature poetry. The cry, "Come back to academe, Berowne honey," has been heard early on, but the play has quickly moved beyond it. The point, then, is *not* that Fiedler's sexual and mythical concerns are out of place in the discussion of Shakespeare; in no writer are the sexual and the social more profoundly combined. But I think that by looking for sexual evasion rather than sexual comprehension Fiedler has missed an opportunity. His pages on the romances (the only place, significantly enough, where he seems willing to grant Shakespeare a balanced and comprehensive view of sex) remind us of how exciting a critic he can be.

Michael Goldman

THE HARROWING OF MOSCOW

DIABOLIAD AND OTHER STORIES. By Mikhail Bulgakov. Ed. Ellendea Proffer and Carl R. Proffer. Trans. Carl R. Proffer. Indiana University Press. Paper. $2.95.

THE EARLY PLAYS OF MIKHAIL BULGAKOV. By Mikhail Bulgakov. Ed. Ellendea Proffer. Trans. Carl R. Proffer and Ellendea Proffer. Indiana University Press. Paper. $3.95.

Probably the most remarkable thing about the career of the Soviet dramatist Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940) is that he had one at

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all. There were others who swam even more stubbornly against the Stalinist current, but they at least had the sense to realize that they could not wrest a living from blatant opposition. Bulgakov's courage verged on madness, for he wished not only to have his cake and eat it, too, but to have the very regime that he was attacking serve it to him on a platter. In his famous letter to Stalin he said, in effect, "either stop hounding me and distorting my works or let me live abroad." Like every great ruler, Stalin was fond of doing the unexpected and responded merely by getting Bulgakov a job at the Moscow Art Theater.

But, sadly enough, it takes more than courage and madness to produce a work of art. Take *The Crimson Island* for instance. The motivation behind this play, written in 1927 for Tairov's Kamerny Theater and, by some miracle, actually produced and performed four times, is resplendently valorous, but it is a penance to read and is probably, today, unplayable. It is rather Pirandello-like: a frame play around an inner play, the actors of one weaving back and forth into the other, blurring both and nicely undercutting any sense of "reality." There is not even perfunctory disguise of the fact that the outer play deals with Bulgakov's own agonies with the censorship, or that the inner play depicts the Revolution as a farce. The basic statement of the play is as uncompromising as the letter to Stalin: "I, the creative artist Bulgakov, protest against the idiotic censors who dare lay hands on my work, and here is my version of the events which gave them their license to do so."

What happens in the play is this. An author brings his new, and overdue, drama, *The Crimson Island,* to a harried theater manager whose first thought is to get it approved by the censor. But the censor, a crass old fool to whom the manager sucks up in the most pathetic way, is on the point of leaving for a month's holiday in the Crimea, so a performance of the play must be instantly slapped together for him without anyone's having laid eyes on the text. The entire personnel of the theater — actors, the janitor, the manager, the author himself — throw themselves into the roles. The new play turns out to be a transparent allegory of how the Bolsheviks came to power. It is set on the mythical island of the title, where Kerensky, Lenin, and Trotsky romp about under such names as Kiri-Kuki, Ki-Kum, and so on. The names alone convey the spirit of this feeble farce, which is rendered even feebler by the slapdash performance for the censor, who announces his decision the moment it is over: banned. Why? The author has committed the ideological solecism of not looking forward at the end to *international* revolution. The frantic theater manager improvises a more suitable ending on the spot, and the play is passed.

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The author has of course been lacerated by the violence done his play and, in the closing moments of the outer play, is given some very moving things to say about the anguish that an artist feels when cretins start pawing his work. For Bulgakov the entire point must have been contained in these one or two pathetic speeches, the only "straight" lines in the whole thing, but while one sympathizes entirely, one has to admit that it couldn't matter less *what* is done to the wooden, stuttering whimsy that one has just endured. What ruins the entire enterprise, I think, is Bulgakov's actually wanting to get the real-life censor's approval. This utterly unrealizable desire drains all the artistic vitality from the work. Bulgakov does not so much pull his punches as turn them into the pointless gestures of a clown, and then he indulges in a self-defeating effort to make Lenin and Trotsky act with a kind of stern nobility at the end of their farce. Ellendea Proffer acutely remarks in her introduction to *The Crimson Island* that "the most terrible censorship is self-censorship," and with regard to this play and certain others among his original works (*Flight,* for example), this strikes me as unarguably true. Stalin was not among those portrayed, but he was anyway not amused and promptly quashed the play forever.

It may seem unfair to begin with these failures. But if Bulgakov were not elsewhere a gifted writer, with a genius for savage comedy, it would scarcely be worthwhile to notice them; besides these failures are so symptomatic of his general situation that they provide a background to make his successes seem even greater. He is known in the West, of course, for his greatest success of all, the flawed but genuinely great novel *The Master and Margarita,* which only came to light in 1967, more than a quarter of a century after Bulgakov's death. It was his secret darling, written over practically the whole span of his career, and with no compromises at all, with no thought of getting it past the censor. The result is artistry of the highest order.

In his own country, however, he is almost exclusively known as a dramatist, and there can be little doubt that the better of these two books is the book of his early plays. The most famous of these is the first title that every literate Russian will associate with the name of Bulgakov, *The Days of the Turbins.* In 1926, when the passions of the Civil War, which greatly exceeded those of the Revolution itself, had scarcely abated, the incorrigible Bulgakov quite naturally offered his metropolitan audience (and censor) a play depicting as warm, sympathetic human beings the *White* opponents of the Bolsheviks. Compromises were minimal. He made his White heroes sympathetic to the Reds at the end, which no doubt saved the play, but the sympathy is

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believably motivated and does no harm to this realistic drama. It has had a history of nervous bannings by censors, who instinctively feel that *something* must be wrong, but Stalin is said to have seen it fifteen times, so that is more or less that.

For all his inventiveness in the matter of grotesque detail, Bulgakov seems to have had a severely limited range of thematic material, from which he got the maximum use, however; it was a habit of his to recycle his prose on the stage, and, whenever he could, to lift his plots and characters from earlier works of fiction. Only in his depictions of the Civil War did he draw directly upon life itself; and there, too, he wrote the story of the Turbins first as a novel, *White Guard,* before making it into a play. He wrote another doublet about Molière: one a straightforward "Life" and the other a play, *A Cabal of Hypocrites,* about Molière's persecution at the hands of Louis XIV and the Compagnie du Saint Sacrement. Bulgakov's play, clearly autobiographical, had an even harder time reaching the stage than did Molière's *Tartuffe,* the suppression of which was his subject. The worst "censorship" this time came from no less a personage than Stanislavsky, who drove Bulgakov into a frenzy by trying to rewrite the whole thing in line with his own conception of Molière. Bulgakov, with his usual frugality, then put *this* experience to use by writing a hilariously bitter novel (translated by Michael Glenny as *Black Snow*) about his troubles with Stanislavsky, whose sacrosanct figure is here caricatured with a mixture of black bile and acid. It would therefore seem possible to open Bulgakov's *oeuvre* at almost any point and find oneself led by numerous threads to every other point in it. He was not a wasteful man.

One would be led as well to points in the work of earlier writers, for the third of Bulgakov's principal sources of inspiration, after the Civil War and the plight (his own) of the lonely, censor-ridden artist, was quite simply the characters and situations of various authors of the past. His imagination would begin with some such hypothesis as: "let us suppose that X were living at the present time and place." If Bulgakov were a feature writer now for a New York paper, he would be sure to turn out an article about the reactions of Natty Bumpo, say, to a stroll down 42nd Street. His work is full of variations on this skeletal plot. One of his prose works is entitled "The Adventures of Chichikov" — the title, incidentally, imposed upon Gogol by the censor, since it was deemed theologically impossible for "souls" to be "dead." It shows, of course, how easily that inveterate con artist would find his place in the contemporary Soviet Union. *The Crimson Island* contains characters from Jules Verne, which happens also to be the *nom de plume* of the

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stage author, and the prose sketch of the same piece contains, for no particular reason that I can see, Kipling's Riki-Tiki-Tavi. Bulgakov's most famous short story, a bit of science fiction entitled "The Fatal Eggs," is drawn quite unblushingly from H. G. Wells's *The Food of the Gods.* The *Diaboliad,* a story about a little government clerk who is caught up in the idiocies of the civil service and driven first to insanity and then to suicide as a result of some trivial offense against a superior, could not exist apart from its altogether obvious dependence upon Gogol and Dostoevski. It may have been his recurrent defeats at the hands of the censorship, and the need to eat, that drove Bulgakov to make his numerous adaptations for the stage (of *Dead Souls, Don Quixote,* and so on), but it is also pretty clear that he tended by nature to be an adapter.

Of all the characters of earlier fiction, the one who returns most often to Bulgakov's modern world is the Prince of Darkness. This is the basis for his Faustian novel, *The Master and Margarita,* but the devil, variously disguised, is almost as ubiquitous in his work as in that of his principal model, Gogol. Zoya, the enterprising bitch who manages to hold onto her "living space" in the play *Zoya's Apartment* by turning it into a zany whorehouse *cum* opium den, is explicitly called "the devil," but we hardly need this to recognize her for what she is. Bulgakov's message to his audience and his various overseers could not have been clearer: the kingdom of darkness is at hand, and it is you who have brought it about. It is not obscured by his wild genius for the absurd nor by his penchant for putting his own life and the works of other writers onto the stage in large unmetabolized chunks.

The amazingly energetic Proffers, who seem to be carrying on a one-family effort to ventilate the study of Russian literature in the U.S. (they more or less single-handedly publish a new journal, *Russian Literature Triquartely,* which combines articles of academic respectability with hilarious and irreverent trivia) have done a generally excellent job of editing. The introductions and commentaries derive from a fresh examination of all the Bulgakov materials they could lay their hands on in Moscow, and they strike me as particularly fine: authoritative, succinct, unpretentious, and just what the reader needs. For the usual reasons, Bulgakov's manuscripts are in a generally terrible disarray. Two different versions of his great novel appeared in English at the same time, and the plays were so tampered with by directors like Stanislavsky that it is difficult now to separate the authentic from the spurious. There are even competing versions of his greatest success, *The Days of the Turbins,* and that may account for the longish omission that I

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note in the Proffers' translation (p. 46), though it hardly seems likely, since there are baffling references to what was left out.

The translation of the prose is generally good, but when one comes to the translation of the plays, one is up against the problem of speakability. This has very little to do with linguistic accuracy; in fact, many of the lessons of linguistic accuracy have to be forgotten when it comes to speakability. Liberties that are anathema to the literalist have to be taken, and this has in general not been done. Two examples will have to serve for many. A man answers the telephone by saying, "I'm listening." Well, that is literally what a Russian says, but on an English-speaking stage an actor had better say "Hello" unless he intends some special effect. The accuracy of the translation is reliable; indeed, I think it is a great deal too reliable. "That's very wrong on your part, Lena, so wrong on your part, Lena," says one character in the heat of strong emotion, and anyone who knows Russian could put that word for word back into the original, but I would defy him to speak it with any conviction from the stage.

Clarence Brown

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

THE AMERICAN INQUISITION, 1945-1960. By Cedric Belfrage. Bobbs–Merrill. $8.95.

Following the Watergate Show from London, an Englishman of liberal persuasion may gradually transfer his attention from the content to the form, so that a creeping alarm diminishes his pleasure in the remorseless exposure of a corrupt and reactionary Presidential Court by the fearless knights-errant of the *Washington Post,* by the honest sage Ervin, and by a host of Grand Juries embodying the Good Sense of the Aroused People. I say "alarm" because the boisterous style of the show, the no-holds-barred competition for publicity, the klieg lights, flashbulbs, and microphones, the daily leaks and daily press conferences, all evoke memories of twenty years ago.

"The American Inquisition" (as Mr. Belfrage suitably calls his study of the postwar, anti-Communist witch hunts) is once again in session. Certainly, the roles are reversed. It is now Nixon, not Truman, who invokes executive immunity; those subpoenaed to face the music are no longer pink professors or First Amendment actors, but hard-faced Republicans from J. Walter Thompson and the new-rich sunshine belt.

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And if roles are reversed, so are attitudes and values. The informer, once so loathsome to liberals, is now urged to open wide his memory, to name names, and to produce documents from his bulging briefcase — that symbol of American fact worship once so precious to Wisconsin farmers.

Such a reversal, of course, has its precedents. In the 1920s and, more particularly, the 1930s, the power of Congressional inquisition was dear to radicals but devilish to bankers and munitions manufacturers, dear to Frankfurter and Black but devilish to the Liberty League. Yet within a few years those same radicals, confronted by Dies, Walter, McCarran, McCarthy, Jenner, and Eastland, were desperately grasping the First and Fifth as they invoked the memory of Jefferson. In those Cold War days the press which indiscriminately headlined fact and rumor, evidence and hearsay, was not the heroic champion of liberty it is now proclaimed to be.

Naturally the growth of executive power and of security agencies undermining security is not a feature peculiar to American government; yet it is only in the U.S. that the executive fortress of clandestine phone taps and bungled burglaries is periodically besieged and assaulted by a populist democracy whose apparent passion for justice may, in the event, be satisfied by a feast of exposure. And in the course of that periodic confrontation, the most written of constitutions reveals invariably its creaking ambiguities and no-man's-lands, its capacity to harbor power hungry factions ready to savage one another in the interests of America and personal ambition. At such moments of high temperature, an essentially commercial civilization can never have enough.

Surely, then, Watergate sheds some light on the nightmarish erosion of restraints which characterized that other inquisition described by Cedric Belfrage, himself a victim. But I doubt whether he would agree. He came to the U.S. in 1926, became a permanent resident in 1937, and, in 1948, helped to found the left-wing weekly, *The National Guardian*. Never a Communist but always a fellow traveler, he encountered between 1950 and 1955 the Immigration Service, Ellis Island, HUAC, McCarthy, the law courts, and the West Street prison. In 1955 he was deported.

When the victim of an unjust deportation later turns historian he faces two problems. First, he must gather his material while physically barred from access to essential documents and sources; secondly, he must quell his bitterness and master his sense of grievance to the extent of achieving an objective overview of events in which he was once a fiercely partisan participant. Belfrage has done better in the first respect than

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OXFORD

"Ultimately what the biographer seeks to elicit is less the events of a writer's life than the 'mysterious armature,' as Mallarme called it, which binds the creative work." —Richard Ellmann, Preface to *Golden Codgers*

The author of *James Joyce, The Identity of Yeats,* and *Ulysses on the Liffey* takes a less conventional approach to literary biography in his new book. After comparing the problems of modern biographers with those of Boswell, he makes a series of forays into that "secret or at least tacit life" that underlies the surface history of several modern writers. From internal evidence in finished works, from earlier drafts, journals and letters, and from the testimony of friends and lovers, Prof. Ellmann draws often startling conclusions — about George Eliot and her Ladislaw, for example, about Ruskin's Venetian honeymoon, about Maud Gonne in Yeats' symbology, Joyce's nakedness, and T. S. Eliot's first marriage.

Golden Codgers
Biographical Speculations
RICHARD ELLMANN
1973 220 pp. cloth $7.95

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in the second. Although his book carries clear signs of editorial compression (it is horribly printed), it contains a wealth of material and exploits to excellent advantage the author's lifelong interest in the South, in the plight of the Negro, by rightly emphasizing the extent to which "anti-Communism" was a favorite alibi of racists determined to keep blacks in their place.

Belfrage is entitled to his bitterness, but his prose is too often burnt out by an acidity which thinly disguises itself in an onerous irony and sometimes collapses into whimsy. Thus W.E.B. DuBois (a principal hero of this book) is said to have been indicted for failing to register as "a traitor"; here, as with the carefree expansion of the central notion of "heresy," Belfrage threatens to mislead those readers whom he does not cause to wince. He is in fact lifting two fingers at the latter-day revisionists, confident that he himself is not obliged to revise or regret anything. And if, rather grudgingly, he now acknowledges that Soviet socialism was not all that it claimed to be, he nevertheless classes as cold warriors all those who presumed to anticipate Khrushchev's confessions. The Communists, we are told, "bloodlessly took power in February" and then proceed to the "socialization" of Czechoslovakia. Soviet "slave labor" slips into quotation marks, thereby becoming so-called Soviet slave labor, while "free world slavery" is given the benefit of no such doubt.

If pro-Soviet spy rings operated in Washington during the war, they must have done so behind Mr. Belfrage's back: "A few heretics infiltrated 'sensitive' war agencies and noted the oddity of the anti-Facist alliance: almost no information was exchanged with the Russians in either direction." The Rosenbergs are held to have been guiltless of espionage. That may indeed be the case (though I doubt it), but if Mr. Belfrage is prepared to concede that Fuchs was a genuine Communist spy and Philby another, is it logical of him to support his view of the Rosenbergs with reference to the work of John Wexley, who argued insanely that Fuchs was really a Nazi spy who pleaded Communism to mitigate his sentence, and to ignore a passage in Philby's recent book where he states unambiguously that the chain of guilt led inexorably from Fuchs to Harry Gold to the Rosenbergs?

Perhaps it is too late for Mr. Belfrage to jettison the journalistic habits of an old war-horse, to forsake the tricks of insinuation and innuendo, to name his sources and provide references for his quotations. Too late, also, to abandon a starkly manichaean view of the witch-hunt era. Just as Mr. Fred Cook, in his recent *The Nightmare Decade,* heaped all the blame on the unholy alliance of reactionary, power-hungry Re-

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New from Yale

Sir Walter Ralegh

The Renaissance Man and His Roles

by Stephen J. Greenblatt

In a portrait that stresses the tension and contradiction as well as the flamboyance of Renaissance England, Stephen Greenblatt presents Sir Walter Ralegh as a symbol of his age. All his life, particularly at moments of crisis, Ralegh was acting out a role, and the interplay between life and art was manifested in both his actions and his writing. The scenes shift from the grim Tower of London to the swamps of Guiana, from the court of the aging Elizabeth back to the Tower as Greenblatt follows Ralegh's turbulent career from his disgrace in 1592 to his conviction for treason against King James in 1603. He combines historical, literary, and psychological concerns to lend credibility to the myth-shrouded Ralegh. "This book is superior to any of the standard works on Ralegh."—*Library Journal* $7.95

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by Donald Lazere

This is the most comprehensive critical work on Camus to be published since his death in 1960, and it brings subsequent literary and historical developments to bear on a thorough reevaluation of his work. Donald Lazere focuses on Camus's literary art, analyzing his philosophical and sociopolitical concerns as integral elements on his aesthetic theory and practice. Camus's concept of the responsibility of the man of letters to his historical time is shown to combine the most valid features of both Marxist-existentialist commitment and art for art's sake. "A clearly reasoned and forcefully written definition of Camus's position, with particular reference to American readers of today. It supplies a need which the various French studies of Camus cannot fill."—Albert Guerard $12.50

Catharine Beecher

A Study in American Domesticity

by Kathryn Kish Sklar

Although she is often remembered only as the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, there was a time in Catharine Beecher's life when she was more widely known than any member of her eminent family. A pioneering teacher, a writer on moral and religious topics, and an avid publicist for women's education, her name became a household word in the 1840s due to the enormous success of her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*. This comprehensive guide to all aspects of domestic self-management was part of her effort to create a female domain from which cultural power could be exercised. Ms. Sklar's perceptive biography offers new insights into the shifting contours of the nineteenth century female experience and is a significant contribution to the intellectual and social history of the period. $12.50

Beyond the Waste Land

A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties

by Raymond M. Olderman

"A valuable survey of some recent novels that reflect the dominance of fable over realism. The author convincingly finds the pattern of the Grail Knight's quest — his immersion in and escape from the 'wasteland' (of Eliot's landmark poem) — in novels by Ken Kesey, Stanley Elkin, John Barth, Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, John Hawkes, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and Peter S. Beagle. . . . The innovative fiction of the Sixties hasn't yet been taken seriously; this excellent book is an indispensable corrective."—*Library Journal* paper $1.95 cloth $7.95

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publicans and desperate Dixiecrat racists detemined to catch the New Deal by the tail, so Cedric Belfrage persists in describing the inquisition as a confrontation between the forces of war and the forces of peace, the forces of capitalism and the forces of socialism.

Such a thesis is necessary but not sufficient to provide a coherent explanation of why the witch-hunts took place *in America* on a scale unmatched by any other Western nation. The British, after all, were soon up to their necks in the Cold War, and the Tories of the Churchill era were no friends of socialism. Why, then, were the three British elections of 1945–51 remarkably free of smear tactics, why were genuine Communists within the British Civil Service merely moved to nonsensitive posts, why did the acting profession, the universities, the schools, and the libraries remain unpurged? Were the British, as some American critics heatedly insisted, simply lazy, smug, and myopic? While I cannot pretend to answer such questions satisfactorily, I do feel convinced that the clue to the American inquisition(s) can be found in a comparative study not only of the political institutions and habits of the two countries, but also, more fundamentally, of typical popular reflexes to anxiety.

In Britain, complacency is the twin brother of sanity. Deferential toward their rulers, assured that their community is held together by strongs bonds it would be impious to examine, and convinced that no Englishman, whatever his ideological conceits, could really love another country more than his own, the British citizen tends to withhold his vote from the politician who accuses his opponents of treason or even bad faith. Whereas American politicians, like the barons of the bastard-feudal era, sometimes wage anarchic war from the separate citadels provided by the Constitution, their British counterparts, whether in government or opposition, know themselves to be members of a common club where the rules are strict and the least infraction warrants instant resignation. And whereas so many Americans apparently define liberty as the suppression of views they do not themselves hold, the Englishman prefers to censor his own television set with finger and thumb. Any attempt to usurp this prerogative strikes him as an aspersion on his own good sense. sense.

I am simplifying and so exaggerating. So infectious is the American way of life to us that even the periodic inquisition may prove hard to resist. Meanwhile, closing Mr. Belfrage's chronicle of persecution, one continues to prefer government by composure to government by exposure.

David Caute

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W. H. AUDEN (1907-1973)

The death of W. H. Auden brings much more than a sense of personal loss to many people besides his friends. It represents the disappearance from the scene of a great poet of equal intellectual and imaginative powers who turned a surprisingly large amount of the shared experience of modern life into the language of his own private, highly idiosyncratic world. His activity as a creator was of the kind which Rilke projected into the task of his Angels in the *Duino Elegies*: that of transmuting the visible world into the invisible realm of language. With his death this week a very active piece of human machinery for transforming our experiences, public and private, into beauty and wit, has become part of the past.

What strikes one about Auden is the tireless energy with which he remolded actuality into highly complex forms. Even when his theme was the Eternal City, he saw it in terms of the temporal city in which we live. Yeats and Eliot were also Rilkean angels, but they often seemed to be transforming Byzantium or eternity into poetry which only referred by analogy to the unecstatic time and place inhabited by their readers.

Gerald Heard remarked to me that Auden (who wrote in a minisculе script when he was young) had the handwriting of a monk annotating the margins of an illuminated manuscript. Like many of his remarks this was slightly off target and yet perceptive. If we suppose that the text on which Auden made his aphoristic comments, cryptic asides, penetrating analyses or, occasionally, approving responses, was contemporary life, then one can plausibly see him in the annotator's role. Occasionally, however, the comment would move to the center of the page and become part of the text of contemporary events. When this happened, Auden achieved, with his readers, one of his striking successes. Yet he distrusted that which seemed to his admirers most central in his own work. "We must love one another or die," "History to the defeated/ May say Alas but cannot help or pardon" — there were lines and poems he struck out with the greatest zest.

He did not use poetry as a vehicle either for self-expression or for propaganda. He thought of the poet as a maker of verbal objects. At the same time he was extremely interested in the stream of events called "History," and in analyzing people and relationships; and he was doctrinal and dogmatic. But although these preoccupations were material for poems, they had to be transformed within the poetry into verbal form

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and texture. The poem had no obligation to represent the attitudes which it might be about.

Auden disclaimed altogether the view that history could be influenced by poetry, even when it might appear that the intention of the poet in his poem was to state an attitude or belief. Another remark of Rilke was that a poet's relationship with his public was a sum of misunderstandings. For Auden, the chief of these (especially when he was in America) was that people took seriously the ideas and attitudes in his poetry as attempts to influence them. The same kind of misunderstanding led to his being thought of as having been in his youth the "leader" of a "movement." But even as an undergraduate he hated literary movements, manifestos, politics, and power. He thought up nothing corresponding to the Imagism of Ezra Pound or the Vorticism of Wyndham Lewis. He did not, like D. H. Lawrence, attempt to run his friends' lives. He was a bit oracular and something of a psychoanalyst, perhaps, in the minds of friends who went to him to show him their poems and to be provided with the psychosomatic diagnoses of their pimples. In the psychoanalytic role, however, he was, as a young man, always extremely funny, buffoon-like, self-parodying. The best portraits of him in this manner are Isherwood's Hugh Weston in *Lions and Shadows* and Cecil Day-Lewis's picture of him as Nigel Strangeways, the detective, in the novels which Day-Lewis wrote under the pseudonym of Nicholas Blake.

His great originality lay in his endlessly fertile invention of symbols, which did not float in the poetry unrelated to anything except by association, as in the work of the symbolist poets, but which, in the manner of Freudian dream symbolism, bodied forth psychological situations, private or social. On one level Auden replaced the "symbol" in poetry by the "symptom." Yet these symbol-symptoms are not equivalents which represent situations outside the poetry. They have an independent, purely poetic existence within it as part of a completely imagined world. At his greatest, as in "In Praise of Limestone," he achieves a complete fusion of the scene observed in nature with the psychological symptom–symbol, and the complete release of this object into that world of marvellous wit and distinction which is the language:

The best and worst never stayed here long but sought
Immoderate soils where the beauty was not so external,
The light less public and the meaning of life
Something more than a mad camp. 'Come!' cried the granite wastes,
'How evasive is your humour, how accidental
Your kindest kiss, how permanent is death.' (Saints-to-be
Slipped away sighing.)

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The early Auden never really gave the impression of being an introvert. The later Auden who returned to England after the war was at once much cozier, and much more isolated. He was kind and affectionate and magnanimous as though all his best nature had ripened. He had done perhaps the reverse of shrinking into himself and becoming egotistic: his ego had, rather, expanded benevolently to enclose everyone and everything he cared about, as part of himself. It was as though he had become an island with his own laws, his own religion, his own mythical inhabitants (who might be his actual friends) and his own timetable on which the trains had to run with extreme punctuality. The stops of the train on this timetable were breakfast at 8; *The Times* crossword puzzle till 11; then, at 11, elevenses (tea); luncheon promptly at 1; tea at 4; vodka martinis at 6; dinner at 7:30; bed at 9. All these appointments, or rail-stops, had to be observed with absolute regularity, as though he had an alarm clock inside him set to go off at intervals. There was a kind of displaced domesticity about him, longing to find a home which he was perfectly prepared to call a "nest." He told me that sometimes he would stand in the garden of his house in Austria, crying with gratitude that he had a home of his own. He was lonely and he hated the modern world (not that of his youth, but what it had become since). Yet he counted his blessings, and he was grateful for what he called his tremendous luck — to have been born when he had and into the English middle class; to have done what he wanted to do; to have the friends he had; to have achieved success; to be received so warmly when he made his public appearances.

He had a great passion for music and nothing pleased him more than writing libretti in collaboration with his friend Chester Kallmann. Two years ago I asked him what music he would like played for a memorial service to him and he replied without hesitation, *"Siegfried's Funeral March."*

Stephen Spender

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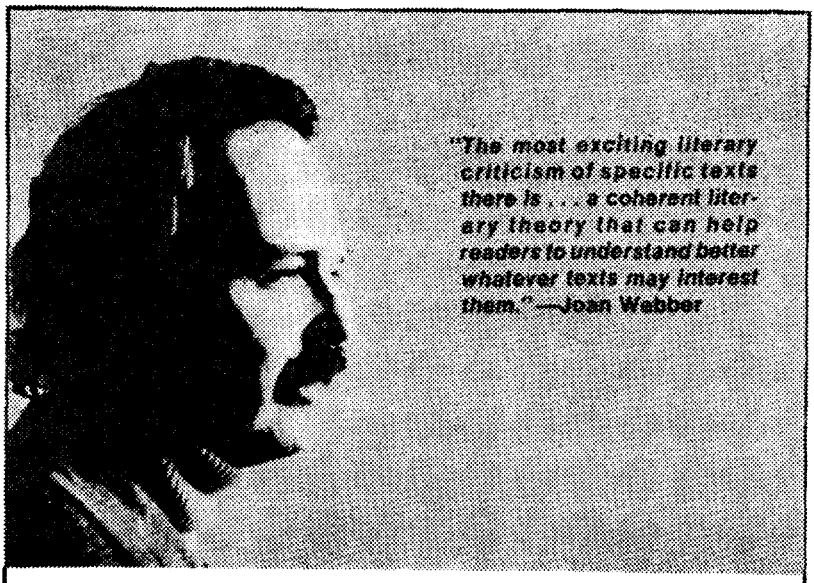

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LETTERS

Sirs:

Pauline Kael has informed me that the Channel 13 program that was my source for saying "she exaggerated purposefully about *Last Tango* because she believes part of her critical role is to overpraise works she thinks are merely good or very good" so that they will be more widely seen, was edited from a longer interview in which she specifically refused to talk about *Last Tango*. She says further that, whatever the impression given by the edited interview, she does not believe in either purposeful exaggeration or self-conscious overpraise as a critical method and stands by everything she originally wrote about the film. I have also learned that Andrew Sarris, Richard Schickel, and John Simon did not know, when they were being interviewed separately about *Last Tango,* that they would be recast as foils to Ms. Kael by the Channel 13 editing room. I apologize to Ms. Kael for perpetuating this false impression about her critical beliefs. My general remarks about the cultural effect of film reviewing and the role of expectation in our appreciation of individual films of course still stand.

Leo Braudy, New York, N.Y.

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STADE is working on a book, **The Forms of Popular Fiction**. . . . **ERICA JONG** has published two books of poetry, and her novel **Fear of Flying** was just put out by Holt. . . . **PAUL ZIETLOW** is professor of English at Indiana University and husband of the President of the City Council of Bloomington. He is the author of **Moments of Vision: The Poetry of Thomas Hardy**, forthcoming from *Harvard in March*. . . . **RICHARD HOWARD** teaches a seminar at Yale "Against Self-Expression." His newest critical book, **Preferences**, will be out from Viking in January. . . . **EDITH KURZWEIL** is a sociologist living in New York. She teaches at Hunter and Montclair State Colleges. . . . **GEORGE LEVINE** heads the Livingston College English Department. He spent the summer trying with only moderate success to distinguish Watergate from **Gravity's Rainbow**. . . . **MICHAEL GOLDMAN's** latest book is **Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama**, from Princeton. . . . **CLARENCE BROWN** translated **Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam** with W. S. Merwin, published by Atheneum. . . . **DAVID CAUTE's The Fellow Travellers** is from Macmillan. Joseph Brodsky's poem "Aeneas and Dido" (PR 2/1973) is included in his **Selected Poems** (translated by George L. Kline) scheduled for November by Harper & Row.

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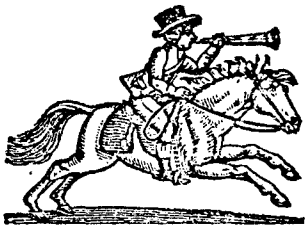

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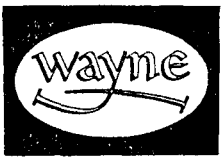

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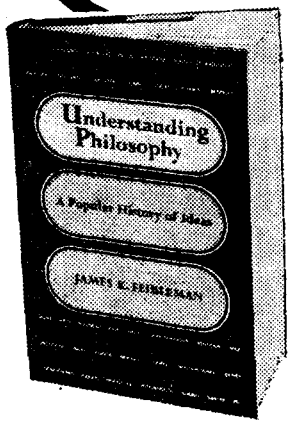
by James K. Feibleman



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